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WEEKLY

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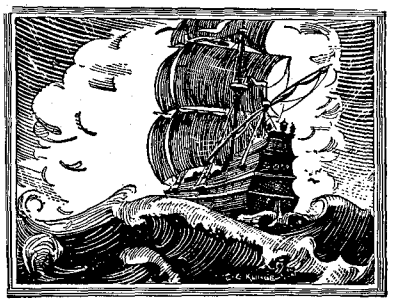

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THIS WEEK MARKS ARGOSY'S

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GOLDEN ARGOSY

FREIGHTED WITH TREASURES FOR BOYS AND GIRLS.

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DO AND DARE;

OR,

A Brave Boy's Fight for Fortune.

By HORATIO ALGER, Jr.

(Author of "Ragged Dick," "Tattered Tom," "Luck and Pluck," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE POST-OFFICE AT WAYNEBORO.

"If we could only keep the post-office, mother, we should be all right!" said Herbert Carr, as he and his mother sat together in the little sitting-room of the plain cottage which the two had occupied ever since he was a boy of five.

"Yes, Herbert, but I am afraid there won't be much chance of it."

"Who would want to take it from you, mother?"

"Men are selfish, Herbert, and there is no office, however small, that is not sought after."

"What was the income last year?" inquired Herbert.

Mrs. Carr referred to a blank book lying upon the table in which the post-office accounts were kept, and answered: "Three hundred and ninety-eight dollars and fifty cents."

"I shouldn't think that would be much of an inducement to an able-bodied man, who could work at any business."

"Your father was glad to have it."

"Yes, mother, but he had lost an arm in the war, and could not engage in any business that required both hands!"

"That is true, Herbert, but I am afraid there will be more than one who will be willing to relieve me of the duties. Old Mrs. Allen called at the office to-day and told me she understood that there was a movement on foot to have Ebenezer Graham appointed."

"Squire Walsingham's nephew?"

"Yes, it is understood that the squire will throw his influence into the scale, and that will probably decide the matter."

"Then it's very mean of Squire Walsingham," said Herbert, indignantly. "He knows that you depend on the office for a living."

"Most men are selfish, my dear Herbert."

"But he was an old school-fellow of father's, and it was as his substitute that father went to the war where he was wounded."

"True, Herbert, but I am afraid that consideration won't weigh with John Walsingham."

"I have a great mind to go and see him, mother. Have you any objection?"

"I have no objection, but I am afraid it will do no good."

"Mr. Graham ought to be ashamed, with the profits of his store, to want the post-office also. His store alone pays him handsomely."

"Mr. Graham is fond of money. He means to be a rich man."

"That is true enough. He is about the meanest man in town."

A few words are needed in explanation, though the conversation explains itself pretty well.

Herbert's father, returning from the war with the loss of an arm, was fortunate enough to receive the appointment of postmaster, and thus earn a small, but with strict economy, adequate income, until a fever terminated his earthly career at middle age. Mr. Graham was a rival applicant for the office, but Mr. Carr's services in the war were thought to give him superior claims, and he secured it. During the month that had elapsed since his death, Mrs. Carr had carried on the post-office under a temporary appointment. She was a woman of good business capacity, and already familiar with the duties of the office, having assisted her husband, especially during his sickness, when nearly the whole work devolved upon her. Most of the village people were in favor of having her retained, but the local influence of Squire Walsingham and his nephew was so great that a petition in favor of the latter secured numerous signatures, and was already on file at the Department in Washington, and backed by the Congressman of the District, who was a political friend of the Squire. Mrs. Carr was not aware that the *movement for her displacement had gone so far.*

It was already nine o'clock when Herbert's conversation with his mother ended, and he resolved to defer his call upon Squire Walsingham till the next morning.

About nine o'clock in the forenoon our young hero rang the bell of the village magnate, and with but little delay was ushered into his presence.

Squire Walsingham was a tall, portly man of fifty, sleek and evidently on excellent terms with himself. Indeed, he was but five years older than his nephew, Ebenezer Graham, and looked the younger of the two, despite the relationship. If he had been a United States Senator, he could not have been more dignified in his deportment, or esteemed himself of greater consequence. He was a selfish man, but he was free from the mean traits that characterized his nephew.

"You are the Carr boy," said the Squire, pompously, looking over his spectacles at Herbert, as he entered the door.

EBENEZER GRAHAM'S INTERVIEW WITH HERBERT AND HIS MOTHER.

"My name is Herbert Carr," said Herbert, shortly. "You have known me all my life."

"Certainly," said the Squire, a little ruffled at the failure of his grand manner to impose upon his young visitor. "Did I not call you the Carr boy?"

Herbert did not fancy being called the Carr boy, but he was there to ask a favor, and he thought it prudent not to show his dissatisfaction. He resolved to come to the point at once.

"I have called, Squire Walsingham," he commenced, "to ask if you will use your influence to have my mother retained in charge of the post-office."

"Ahem!" said the Squire, somewhat embarrassed. "I am not in charge of the post-office department."

"No, sir, I am aware of that, but the Postmaster General will be influenced by the recommendations of people in the village."

"Very true!" said the Squire, complacently. "Very true, and very proper. I do not pretend to say that my recommendation would not weigh with the authorities at Washington. Indeed, the member from our district is a personal friend of my own."

"You know how we are situated," continued Herbert, who thought it best to state his case as briefly as possible. "Father was unable to save anything, and we have no money ahead. If mother can keep the post-office we shall get along nicely, but if she loses it we shall have a hard time."

"I am surprised that in your father's long tenure of office he did not save something," said the Squire, in a tone which indicated not only surprise but reproof.

"There was not much chance to save on a salary of four hundred dollars a year," said Herbert, "after supporting a family of three."

"Ahem!" said the Squire, pompously, looking over his spectacles at Herbert, as he entered the door.

"That is well!" said Squire Walsingham, "but, my young constituent—I mean my young friend—I apprehend that you do not take a right view of public office. It is not designed to support a privileged class in luxury."

"Luxury, on four hundred a year!" replied Herbert.

"I am speaking in general terms," said the Squire, hastily. "I mean to say that I cannot recommend a person to office simply because he or she needs the income."

"No, sir, I know that, but my mother understands the duties of the office, and no complaint has been made that she does not make a good postmaster."

"Possibly," said the Squire, non-committally, "but I am opposed upon principle to conferring offices upon women. Men are more efficient, and better qualified to discharge responsible duties."

"Then, sir," said Herbert, his heart sinking, "I am to understand that you do not favor the appointment of my mother?"

"I should be glad to hear that your mother was doing well," said the Squire, "but I cannot conscientiously favor the appointment of a woman to be postmaster of Wayneboro."

"That means that he prefers the appointment should go to his nephew," thought Herbert.

"If my mother were not competent to discharge the duties," he said, his face showing his disappointment in spite of himself, "I would not ask your influence, notwithstanding you were a schoolmate of father's, and he lost his arm while acting as your substitute."

"I have already said that I wish your mother well," said the Squire, coloring, "and in any other way I am ready to help her and you. Indeed, I may be able to procure you a situation."

"Where, sir?"

"Mr. Graham needs a boy in his store, and I think he will take you on my recommendation."

"Is Tom Tripp going away?" asked Herbert.

"The Tripp boy is unsatisfactory, so Mr. Graham tells me."

Herbert knew something of what it would be to be employed by Mr. Graham. Tom Tripp worked early and late for a dollar and a half per week, without board, for a hard and suspicious taskmaster who was constantly finding fault with him. But for sheer necessity he would have left Mr. Graham's store long ago. He had confided the unpleasantness of his position to Herbert more than once, and enlisted his sympathy and indignation. Herbert felt that he would not like to work for Mr. Graham at any price, more especially as it seemed likely that the storekeeper was likely to deprive his mother of her office and income.

"I should not like to work for Mr. Graham, sir, *as* said.

"It appears to me that you are very particular, young man," said Squire Walsingham.

"I would be willing to work for you, sir, but not for him."

"Ahem!" said the Squire, somewhat mollified, "I will think of your case."

Herbert left the house, feeling that his mother's removal was only a matter of time.

CHAPTER II.

HERBERT'S CHANCE.

HERBERT left the house of Squire Walsingham in a sober frame of mind. He saw clearly that his mother

DECEMBER 9 1882

DECEMBER 10 1932

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ARGOSY

1882 : Fiftieth Anniversary Issue : 1932

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ARGOSY

VOLUME 234 SATURDAY, DECEMBER 10, 1932 NUMBER 5

The Longhorn Feud

By MAX BRAND

Author of "The Untamed," "Señor Jingle Bells," etc.

Holy Creek, Barry Litton soon discovered, was the sort of cowtown where even the steers are branded with death's heads

CHAPTER I.

DRINKS ON A STRANGER.

EVERY one in Holy Creek remembers the day that Barry Litton, better known as Blue Barry, came to town, because most of the people had a chance to see him, and to see him in action, before that day ended.

It was during the hot middle of the morning—though any time after sunrise was hot in Holy Creek—that a man on a mule rode into the place, following a tall fellow on a mare, brown with black points. They were dust-covered.

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There was nothing distinguished about them, except the dainty way in which the mare picked up her feet, and the width between her eyes, and the smallness of a muzzle fit to drink out of a pint pot, as the Arabs say of their chosen horses.

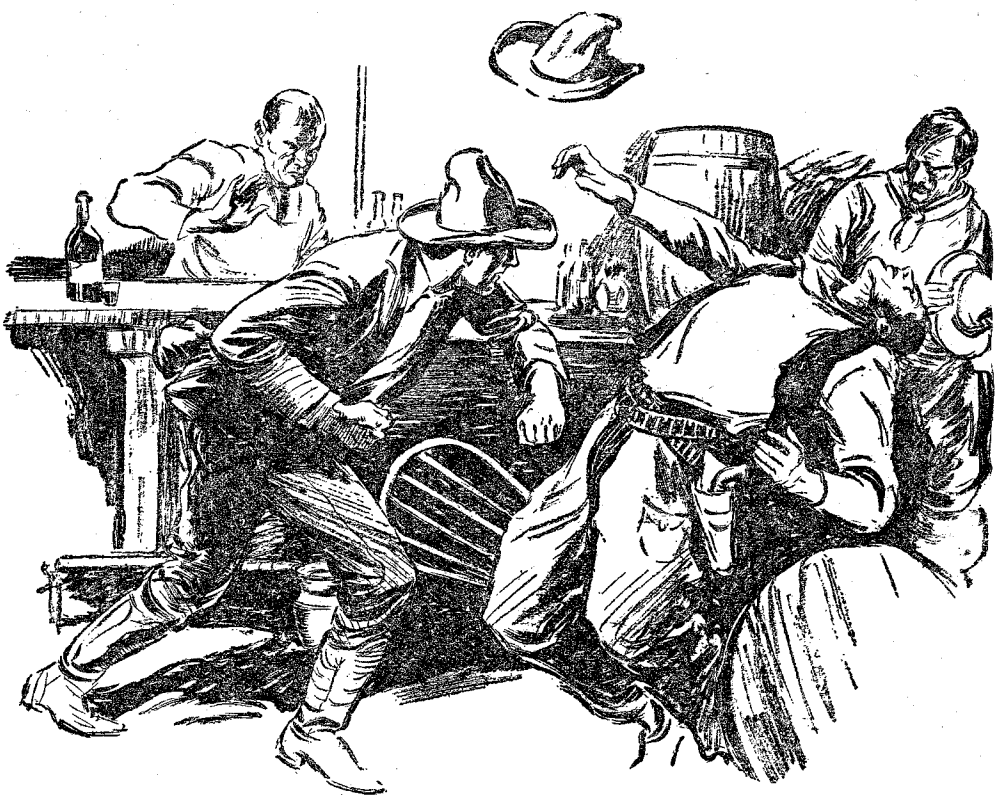
When the two came to Pudge Oliver's saloon, they rode in under the wide roof that was built out as far as the watering troughs. Under that roof Pudge Oliver always kept the sand well wetted down with buckets of water, and although that water was apt to be steaming at the edges, where the sun got at it, it looked cool and inviting to any one who was thirsty, and it drew a great deal of patronage into the saloon.

The tall man drew rein, and looked over a line of idlers on the veranda. They were resting between drinks, and exchanging gossip.

"Willow!" he said.

The man on the mule tumbled out of his saddle, and ran up to salute the first speaker. "Yes, sir?" said he.

The idlers on the veranda looked at one another, and sat forward. Citizens in the town of Holy Creek were not addressed as "sir" unless they were very old indeed, and very much respected.



The unwelcome stranger's fist flashed out

They were the more surprised because Willow himself wore an air of importance. He was not very tall, but he had a ponderous torso mounted on a pair of bowed legs that looked made to order for hooking around the sides of a rambunctious horse. Furthermore, as he saluted, the loose sleeve of his coat

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fell back a little and showed a wonderfully brawny forearm covered with hair, and through the shadow of the hair gleamed the reds and purples of some elaborate tattooing.

Here was a man who seemed to have been through the wars; the sort of a man who might have been picked to boss a round-up, and yet he was "sirring" his companion.

"Willow," said the first rider, "this looks like a place where a fellow might have a drink, eh?"

"It's kind of got that look, sir," said Willow, cocking his eye at the battered swinging doors that admitted one to the sanctum. He licked his dusty, cracking lips as he spoke.

"You can't tell by the outsides of a place, though," said the tall young man. "Go inside and have a look around, will you? If it seems real on the inside, come out and tell me, will you?"

"Sure I will," said Willow, and proceeded to do so.

HE went hastily up the steps and through the swinging doors.

Of course this was at the time when the great Chaney-Morgan cattle war was on—the war that began over the steer that finally had a death's head branded into its side, so that it was called the Dead Man Steer. And it just happened that Jerry Deacon, of the Morgan outfit, was in that saloon at the time, having a drink and a little argument with a stranger over the merits of the case. Since the stranger disagreed, at the very instant that Willow pushed the doors open, both men were going for their guns, and Jerry Deacon was a split second faster than the other fellow. His bullet laid the other's forearm open to the elbow. The stranger dropped his gun, and stood stupidly looking at the running blood.

"Hey, quit messing up the floor!" shouted Pudge Oliver. "Go into the back room, there, and let the cook tie you up."

Willow stepped outside the swinging doors and hailed his companion.

"It looks real and it sounds real," he said.

"That doesn't mean anything," said the man on the mare.

So Willow reëntered, and at the bar ordered a drink. He paid for it, sniffed it, and drank it.

He went back to the swinging doors and opened them a second time. "Smells real and tastes real," said he.

"Every man can make mistakes," said the other. "Have another drink."

Jerry Deacon's blood was up. He had meant to split the wishbone of yonder stranger, and he was grieved and surprised because his bullet had traveled a whole three inches outside of his intentions.

He said, "What tastes real, and what looks real?"

"The whisky and the blood," said Willow, ordering another drink, and licking his cracked lips. "But I got a boss that's hard to convince. Have a drink with me, bo?"

There were two things about this speech that were offensive to Jerry Deacon. One was that he was called "bo," which as all people know is short for "hobo," and the second was that any one should dare to speak lightly of his gunwork.

He edged closer to the bar, as he answered, "I don't drink with strangers."

"Stay dry, then," remarked Willow, as he rolled the second glassful over his huge tongue.

"I dunno that I'll stay dry, either," said Jerry Deacon.

"Go and be damned, then, if that suits you better!" said Willow.

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"Is that your game?" remarked Jerry Deacon. And dropping the weight of his stalwart six feet and three inches behind the blow, he hammered a straight right against the chin of the stranger.

Willow went backwards on his heels, taking both short steps and long. He hit the doors with his shoulders, stumbled backwards onto the veranda, and nearly fell.

"And it *is* real," he shouted to his friend. With that he charged back into the saloon to renew the battle, because he, too, was a fighting man.

The tall fellow now slipped from the brown mare and entered the saloon at the rear of the crowd which was pouring in to see the fight. And as they livened the air with their cowboy yells, he saw Willow receive a right and a left, a beautiful one-two punch, flush upon the end of the chin.

AGAIN Willow staggered backwards on his heels. He should have fallen in a crumbling heap, except that he was made of iron.

After him came big Jerry Deacon. Jerry was good with a gun, but he was far better with his hands. And now he wanted nothing but to smash the stranger to bits. He might have done it with ease, because Willow's hands were down and his eyes were bleared. It was not kindliness that prevented Deacon from doing just that; but as he charged he was tripped from the side, and almost fell on his face.

This was interference. It was almost mockery. Deacon forgot all about the half-beaten form of Willow, and whirled about, yelling, "Who did that?"

"I did, brother," said Willow's friend. "He's five inches shorter and thirty pounds lighter than you are."

"I'll lighter you!" cried Jerry Deacon. He was half minded to draw a gun and work in blood, as he said this, but the stranger stood with his hands on his hips, and with such a peculiarly mocking smile on his lips that it seemed to Jerry there would be no satisfaction in anything except in a laying on of hands.

So he went in to break the stranger up, but he did not go in blindly. A really good boxer never does that, and Jerry Deacon was really good. He came with a beautiful long left that worked with oiled precision, though it carried all his weight.

Somehow he missed the mark. He lurched forward, his impetus spent on the thin air; and then the floor rose with dizzy suddenness against the face of Jerry Deacon, and at the same instant the ceiling dropped upon his head. His brain was covered by a wave of utter blackness.

It had all been very quiet and simple, but keen eyes had been watching. Men who rope steers and pitch hay understand that strength is nothing and art is everything. So they comprehended that twitch of the shoulder and that lilt of the body which had cracked a hundred-and-eighty-pound whiplash neatly on the chin of the redoubtable Jerry Deacon.

TWO or three men ran forward to help the fallen man, but the stranger remarked, "You'd better leave him there. If his neck's broken, you can't do him any good. If it's not broken, he needs some time to cool off before he comes to. Step up and liquor with me, boys, because this looks to me like a real town, full of real people."

He smiled on them and laughed with them as he said this. And suddenly

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Jerry Deacon was forgotten. He lay there bleeding quietly on the floor, gradually recovering his wits, while the others filled their glasses from the bottles that Pudge Oliver spun up and down the length of the bar, bringing them to rest at the appointed intervals.

Pudge Oliver filled his glass with the rest, invited by a cheery nod from the stranger. "What's your name, brother?" demanded Pudge.

"My name is Barry Litton," said the stranger.

"Blue Barry is what they call him," said Willow. "Blue for the color of his eyes."

"Here's to you, Blue!" called the saloon keeper. "Here's in your eye!"

"Here's in everybody's eye!" said the stranger. "May the world never be rounder!"

They turned bottoms up, and Willow said to a neighbor, "Anybody know that gent on the floor?"

"I know him," said the man addressed.

"He's good with his fists," said Willow, "but he's had enough from that side of the page. Maybe when he wakes up, he'll start dreamin' about guns. If you know him, you better try to lead him out of here on the quiet. Because if he starts any more trouble, that poison will start workin' on him—under the skin." He hooked a significant thumb towards Barry Litton, as he spoke.

The cowpuncher who had been thus addressed, after a glance at Litton, went to the place where Jerry Deacon was just beginning to bestir himself on the floor. What the cowboy said to Deacon no one could hear, but it was enough to make Jerry Deacon arise quietly and slip almost unnoticed from the saloon, one hand pressed thoughtfully against the bump that was rising on his jaw.

CHAPTER II.

WHERE THEY GROW WILD.

PUDGE OLIVER was as honest as he was fat.

"Litton—or Blue—or whatever they call you, mostly," he said, "you may have worked up a neat little bit of trouble for yourself."

"How come?" asked the tall young man, with his cheerful smile.

"Why," said Pudge Oliver, "it's this way: Jerry Deacon is one of the best men that the Morgan bunch have got, and they're likely to chip in on his side. You wanta watch your step, unless there's some Chaneys around. They'd take mighty kindly to anybody that had socked Jerry on the chin the way that you've just gone and done!"

"What's eating the Morgans and the Chaneys?" asked Blue Barry Litton.

"It's a steer," said Pudge.

"Can't the steer eat hay, and not men?" said Litton.

"It's this way," explained the bartender, while the rest of the crowd listened with interest, though to them it was a familiar tale. "It's this way. There was a steer, d'ye mind, up on the range where the Chaney and the Morgan interests sort of overlapped. A Chaney puncher brings him to the round-up with the right ear mark; and there's a Morgan man at the round-up, and he points out that the second part of that ear mark is pretty doggone fresh, and without that second part of the earmark it would be a real Morgan steer. Pretty soon those two boys get out their guns and shoot themselves sick. But the Chaneys, they

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get the steer, in the windup; and then the Morgans come over, and by night they cut the steer out of the night herd of the Chaneys, on Chaney ground, and take it back and put it up in their corral. The Chaneys get real wild when they hear this. They get a bunch together, and they make a morning raid, like old Injun days. There's three men killed in that party—two Chaneys and a Morgan, because the Morgans were ready and waiting, and they turned the Chaneys back . . .

"A while later, the Chaneys try again, and this time they get the steer, but they don't go far, because the Morgans overtake 'em. There's a fine battle, and out of fifteen men there ain't a one that ain't sick with the lead that's in him, before the finish. The steer runs loose. A coupla times the Chaneys catch him up, and the Morgans come shootin' for him. A coupla times the Morgans catch him up, and the Chaneys start up the war again; until finally the sheriff takes and catches up that steer himself. Somebody'd branded the critter with a death's head above a pair of crossed bones.

"The sheriff's got the steer now, holdin' it in the name of the law, till a lawsuit is decided on the ownership. Because the Chaneys got the first law decision, and the Morgans, they won the case on appeal; and now it's in a higher court. They say that the sheriff will sell that steer, if anybody's willing to buy it, because he's tired of feeding it. But, first and last, fifteen men have died for that Dead Man Steer, and more are gunna die, before the end."

"WHY doesn't the sheriff knock the steer on the head?" said Barry Litton.

"Why, he don't dare to," answered the bartender. "And **nobody** else would dare to, 'less he wanted both the gangs down on his head. The time has come, around here, when there ain't nothing but guns and gunmen, and the days are pretty bad."

"Why," said Litton, "seems to me you're selling your share of whisky."

"Sure I am," answered Pudge Oliver, "but there's been so many holes put in the walls and the roof of this here place by bullets which missed the mark, that when the rains commence she's gunna leak like a sieve. I've lost seven of them big mirrors from behind the bar; an' finally I give up, and kept that cracked one. Most men can't stand the pace here in Holy Creek—and doggone me, neither can the glassware!" He sighed as he said this.

"That's a good name," remarked Barry Litton. "That's as good a name as I ever heard for a town—except that it takes a little time for the saying of it."

"It's this way," said one of the punchers near Blue Barry. "In the old days there was a Mormon or something comes by this way, and he takes and breaks a wagon here, and has to stay awhile—with all his wives and children. It happens that while he's here there's some rains, and a little water is runnin' in the draw, outside of town. So he calls it Holy Creek, and puts up a sign to that effect when he goes on. But there ain't any Creek, really, and it sure ain't a holy town. Still, I guess that's why the name has stuck so good!"

There was more laughter, after this recital.

"It sounds to me," said Barry Litton, "like a really good place for a man to put up."

"It is," declared Pudge Oliver. "The whisky keeps well here, as long

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as it's in the barrel. It's that kind of a climate. You take a lot of places, there ain't any regular wind that blows in the middle of the summer. But here in Holy Creek there's wind pretty nearly every day in the year; just like a dragon was breathing in your face."

"It sounds pretty good to me," said Barry Litton.

"People here don't use starch when they wash clothes," said Pudge, "and that's a saving."

"Why no starch?" asked Barry Litton.

"Because the salt of a gent's sweat will stiffen his shirt for him in a coupla hours, any day," said Pudge Oliver.

"I LIKE this kind of a town," said Barry Litton, "because of the people that are in it. It takes a cool man to live in as hot a town as this. Why did you choose this place, brother, to put up a saloon?"

"I've been run out of all the other counties in the state," said Pudge Oliver. "That's one reason. And the other reason is that the folks around here are afraid to drink the water. The whisky's purer."

"I think I'll try my luck here," said Barry Litton.

"What kind of luck do you like?" asked the bartender, while the others listened more intently than before.

"I like," said Barry, "four crooks all sitting at a table with a lot of money in their wallets, and asking for a fifth hand. That's the sort of weather that I bloom in."

They laughed again, as they heard this.

"How about a common or garden greenhorn—a regular tenderfoot with a million in his bank?" asked Pudge Oliver. "You wouldn't shy at that kind of a mark, would you?"

"I don't like that kind," said Litton. "Green fruit always makes me sick. I never eat it. The harder the nut, the sweeter the kernel, brother."

He produced three dice from nowhere, threw them to the ceiling, and made them come rattling back into his palm. "That's the music that I like to hear," said he. "But I don't like the boys to think that they're playing against luck when they're playing with me."

"Look here," said Pudge, "you mean to say that you make a living out of the cards and the dice? Without keeping your game on the quiet?"

"It's this way," answered the stranger. "The more I talk about it, the more some of the wise ones will wink to themselves. They know that a really handy man with the cards never boasts. And they can't help asking me to sit down while they trim me. That's the way I always make my stakes. Right now there's some of the boys along your bar that would like to ask me to a little card game.—Speak up, brothers, and lemme know the truth!" He looked up and down the line.

A LONG, lean, hard-faced man with an eye that was the blue-gray of steel, looked back up the bar and said, "I'll play with you, son. I'll see how good you are!"

"It's a match!" called several others.

But Blue Barry cheerfully answered, "No, you're a working man. You can't juggle the cards or make the dice talk back to you unless your hands are soft. There's a pair of hands, gentlemen, that are always kept soft. Look at them! The pride of my life are those hands. Never done a stroke of work in their lives—and they never *will* do a stroke of work, until I change my mind!"

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He spread his hands on the bar. Brown, beautifully tapering, slender and long, they looked almost like the hands of a woman; but they were big, with muscular cushions under the thumbs.

"Does it pay you, brother?" asked the bartender.

"Why, man," answered Litton, "what d'you think?—I've been around the world, and lived on the fat. I walk where I want to walk, and I talk where I want to talk. I've done so much for these hands of mine that they wouldn't lie down on me and give me a bad deal in return."

"Well, then," said Pudge Oliver, "what brings you out here? If you've got what you want other places, why would you want to come here?"

"That's easy," said Litton. "It's partly because it's in my blood. But more than that, it's to fill out my game."

"Well?" asked Pudge Oliver.

"There's plenty of money in the rest of the world," said the stranger, "but there's a shortage of men. A big shortage, mind you! I came out here where they grow wild. I want to see what they're like!"

CHAPTER III.

A DRINK ON THE SHERIFF.

THEY went out into the sunshine, Litton and Willow.

"Still like this port, Tom?" asked Litton.

"I never liked it much, even when I first heard you speak of it," said Willow. "I only said it was real. And you ain't asked what part is real about this harbor."

"Well, what part, then?"

"The reefs and the sunken rocks," said Tom Willow. "They're the *real* part of it, sir."

"We'll make it like home," declared Blue Barry. "With a good navigator like me, Tom, and a good hand like you at the helm, we'll be right at home. Where does the sheriff live, I wonder?"

"Sheriff?" exclaimed Willow. "What on earth do you want with a sheriff?"

"I want to see the steer he's boarding," said Litton.

"I knew it when I seen your face!" said Tom Willow. "When I seen you shining your eyes, I knew that you had ideas, and all of my bones, they begun to ache all at once—and all over."

"Why, what's the matter, Tom?" asked Litton.

"Aw, I dunno," said Willow. "I guess I'm gettin' old. Ridin' fifty miles a day, that ain't nothing. Crossin' a few deserts is nothing but fun. A few sand storms—what are they to talk about? As for livin' on what we can shoot, in the way of skinny rabbits and what not, I guess that kind of chuck is too good for an old tar like me. And as for a few slams on the jaw like I got from Jerry Deacon, who must have had sledgehammers tucked into his hands, why, they're just enough to make the fun right. So I dunno why it was that I got sort of an ache all over when I seen that light in your eyes.— Only, I guess I'm gettin' old. I've seen a lot of lightning in the sky, sir; but when I see yours, I always know that it's gunna strike—and that it's gunna strike right near me!"

He ended this speech with a sigh, and a shake of the head.

"He hit you pretty hard," agreed Litton. "I've tried to teach you how to use your head for ducking and riding with punches, instead of using it like a wall for the other fellow to break

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his fists on. You've never learned the trick, though."

"It's this way," said Tom Willow. "A fight is a fight, and I dunno that I ever minded a good, straight fight. But my idea of a scrap is where you slug and get slugged, and the one that slugs the hardest, he wins. But I never held by these here stampings and dancings, and all of that. They kind of upset me, and I ain't at home with 'em. But if it was a fight where you roughhouse, then I'm kind of easy, because that's the way I was raised. It ain't everybody that has a chunk of lead pipe on the end of a string, the way you have when you sock a gent on the chin, sir."

The other shrugged his shoulders. "If you can't remember anything else," Barry said, "remember that crouch, and the long left. Anyway, Jerry Deacon got just a little more than he sent."

"He was cock-eyed," said Tom Willow, with a grin of delight. "He certainly was knocked for a loop." He chuckled.

"About this town," said the master. "I'm sorry you don't like it. Because to me it looks like a bright place."

"Yeah—and I knew you'd like it," agreed Tom Willow. "A place where they even brand their cows with a death's head. You couldn't help liking that kind of a joint."

WILLOW paused, and then added, "Trouble is the stuff for you to breathe, all right—except the kind that comes too far south."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Litton.

"South Seas," said Tom Willow.

"Why," said Litton, "that's the cream of the world, Tom!"

"Ay," nodded Willow, "but I've seen the cream turn sour. When you saw Stacey—"

He held the next words back by clicking his teeth together, and stared with frightened eyes at his companion. Blue Barry had halted in mid stride. Some of the color left his face. He looked straight before him, out of narrowed eyes, as though he was confronting a leveled gun.

"I'm sorry," said Willow. "That damned name—it just sort of slipped out!"

"That's all right," said Litton, drawing a deep breath and walking on. "It's a jolt when I hear— Well, let it go."

They went on in silence, Tom Willow still watching his master with eyes of fear and awe.

Litton hailed a freckle-faced youngster who was passing, scuffing his feet for the sole purpose of raising a vast cloud of dust.

For his own part, the boy did not mind dust; as for others, the more he could annoy them, the more he admired the effects.

"Where's the sheriff to be found, partner?" asked Litton.

The boy shrugged one shoulder. "Somewhere between here and a bad time for somebody or other," said he. He walked on.

The long arm of Litton went out and collared him. The boy turned, a green light in his eyes.

"Leave me be!" he said.

"Where do I find the sheriff?" asked Litton.

"Leave me be!" said the boy, "or I'll punch you in the stomach, you long-legged chunk of nothing-worth-while. Leave me go!"

"I told you it was a good town, Tom," said Litton. "Even the boys have learned how to talk, eh?—Listen,

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partner," he added to the boy, "I like to wring necks, but I don't want to start on you unless I have to. Where does the sheriff live?"

"In his house," said the lad.

"That's news for me," remarked Litton. "He lives in his house, an' not in a hotel, eh?"

"There ain't any hotel," said the boy. "Leave me go, or I'll break your shins!"

"You've told me everything that I want to know," said Litton. "The sheriff lives in his house down the street."

The eyes of the boy glinted again. "That's right," he said, "down the street."

Litton turned him loose. "He lives *up* the street," said Barry. "That's all I can find out. I tell you what, Tom, this town gets better and better! This is the sort of a town that I call *hard.*"

"I could of told you that a long time ago," said Willow.

THEY turned back up the street, and after walking some distance, Litton stopped in front of a house with a short, high veranda before it. A long-haired, gray-bearded man sat in a rocking chair on the porch, smoking a pipe with a curved stem.

"Morning," said Litton. "Can you tell me where the sheriff's house is?"

"What's the trouble?" said the man with the pipe, speaking from a corner of his wide mouth.

"No trouble.—I just want to find the sheriff."

"Nobody wants to find the sheriff," said the gray-beard, "unless there's trouble. What's the matter with you?"

"It's about the steer that the sheriff keeps."

"Oh, is it?—And you mean to say that steer ain't trouble?"

"It's no trouble of yours," broke in Tom Willow.

"What makes you think it ain't?" asked the man on the porch. He now developed sufficient interest to cause him to remove the pipe from his mouth. When that was done, he looked calmly down on them. "That steer's a whole pile of trouble to me, I can tell you."

"Can you tell us where we can find it, then?"

"In the back yard."

"What back yard?" asked Litton.

"The sheriff's back yard."

"That puts me back at the beginning," said Litton. "I want to know where the sheriff lives."

"What sort of trouble are you in?" repeated the gray-beard.

"Damn it all!" said Litton. "I'm *not* in trouble. Whose back yard is that steer in?"

"In the sheriff's back yard, like I told you," said the man on the porch.

They seemed to have reached a complete impasse. The man on the porch replaced his pipe between his teeth and looked calmly and vaguely across the roofs of the other houses, towards the blue mountains. It was plain that he considered the conversation at an end.

"Hold on," said Litton, taking up a new thread. "How does it happen that that steer gives *you* trouble?"

"What steer?" mumbled the other.

"The Dead Man Steer."

"Because I have to take care of it," said the man on the front veranda.

"Oh, you work for the sheriff, do you?"

"No."

"Who *do* you work for?"

"Myself," said the veteran.

Litton began to chuckle. "You've got me puzzled," said he.

"You ain't the first," said the other.

"Who are you?" said Litton.

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"The oldest man in Holy Creek," said the man on the porch.

"I believe it," said Litton. "You're the oldest man—and you're the toughest."

"YOUNG feller," said the man of the beard, "if you get fresh, I'll come down there and put my hands on you."

"All right," said Litton. "I can't find out who you are, and I can't find out what you do, except that you take care of the steer, and that you don't work for the sheriff."

"That's right," said the other. "Now you boys trot along and leave me to my smoke."

"But the sheriff has to take care of the steer," said Litton.

"Never said he didn't," replied the other.

"Then you're the sheriff?" asked Litton.

"You can make up your mind for yourself," said the other.

"Why, now I come to look again," said Litton, "I've seen pictures of you."

"It's the long hair that makes them take pictures of me," said the other. "Every damn fool who sees my long hair says that he's seeing the real wild and woolly West, and he gets out his camera. I've busted twenty-thirty cameras, in my time. I hope I'll last to break twenty or thirty more."

"You're the famous sheriff," said Litton. "You're Sheriff Dick Wilson."

"I never said I wasn't," said the other.

Litton walked up the steps and shook hands.

"I'm Barry Litton," said he.

"Never heard of you," answered the gruff sheriff.

"No," said Litton, "but you're going to."

At this, Dick Wilson took his pipe from between his teeth and looked the visitor up and down. "What you want around here?" he asked.

"I want the steer," said Litton.

"What you want it for?"

"Because I haven't had any pets for a long time," said Litton. "I need something to play around the room and lie down on my feet to keep 'em warm of a cold evening. I need something with an eye that will brighten when it hears my footfall. I need something on which I can lavish the love, Sheriff Wilson, which is man's inherent gift from the Creator, and which man must give again, sir—be it on high or low—else the spirit which—"

"WHY," interrupted the sheriff, "doggone my hide if you don't talk like one of these here damned sky-pilots!"

"Thank you very much," said Litton.

"I didn't mean it for a compliment, neither," said the sheriff.

"Oh, I know," said Litton, "you're one of those diamonds in the rough—one of the hearts of gold under a rude exterior—one of God's Gentlemen—"

"Hey, quit that, will you?" said the sheriff, in haste.

"I'm just trying to be agreeable," remarked Litton.

"You ain't, though," said the sheriff. "I don't agree with nothing that you say!—I'd like to know something, though. Where'd you come from?"

"From right over there," answered Litton, with a wave of his hand that included half of the points of the compass.

"I thought you did," replied the sheriff. "The big wind come from the

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same place, too. Don't it give you no pain to keep on talkin' the way you do?"

"Not if I can get the Dead Man Steer," said Litton.

"What would you do with it—aside from makin' a parlor pet out of that longhorn?"

"Why," said Litton, "I'd simply teach it to do a few tricks, and then I'd put it in a pen and charge five cents a head for a look."

"You wouldn't make much money," said the sheriff, "because there ain't many people in this town, an' most of 'em has seen the steer, one time or another."

"The boys would come in from the range to look."

The sheriff arose, with a sigh. "I wouldn't wanta try to talk you down," he said, "because I see that you thrive on talk. If you want that damn' steer, you know what you'll do?"

"Yes, I'll keep it behind a fence."

"Until the Chaneys or the Morgans decide to come down and take it away from you. Come on and see the damn' thing, though."

HE led the way to the rear of the house; and there, in a small corral close to the barn, stood a big longhorn. It was fat and strong, with sleepy eyes; it chewed its cud. In the full blaze of the sun, it was a yellow-gray in color, with a yellow spot over one eye and a black spot over the other, which gave it an odd effect of looking in two directions at the same time.

"That's the steer," said the sheriff. "I gotta hold it till the lawsuit's settled. But law ain't ever gunna settle that. Blood's the only thing that 'll ever lay the dust."

"Well," said Barry, "I'll take that steer off your hands, and I'll produce it when you want it."

"Take it, then," answered the sheriff. "That fool steer can eat up five dollars' worth of hay in a week—unless you put green glasses on it and feed it sawdust for grass."

"Hey, Dick!" called a raucous voice from the other side of the high board fence of the corral.

"Yeah?" asked the sheriff. "Whacha want, eh?"

"They's been a rumpus down at Pudge Oliver's place."

"Anybody dead?"

"No, but a limber lookin' gent come to town and got arguin' with Jerry Deacon. Knocked Jerry cold."

"Nobody is knockin' Jerry Deacon cold," said the sheriff, "except with the butt of a gun, or a club."

"This gent done it with his fist. I seen him. He's got a bow-legged sailor along with him that started the fight; but the young bird was the one that finished it—whango! You better come along down and be on deck, because the whole doggone Morgan clan is pretty sure to come pilin' into town lookin' for that man."

"Go back and tell the boys that the stranger is by name of Litton, and that I've hired him to keep the murder steer for me. That 'll cheer things up around this town, a pretty good deal."

There was a yell of surprise from the man beyond the fence, and then a scurry of retreating footfalls.

The sheriff grinned broadly. "Looks to me," he said, "like this town was gunna open both its eyes, pretty soon. Looks to me like I feel younger than I did a while back."

"Good," said Litton. "Willow, bring a rope, and we'll take that little steer away to his new home."

Willow brought the rope. The yel-

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low steer, trained by much handling in the course of his life, came on the lead as readily as a dog. With his eyes half closed, and still chewing his cud, he ambled down the street behind Willow.

"Which way?" said Willow.

"The hotel," said his master. He screened his eyes, for he was looking against the sun. He stared fixedly at the great brand which had been drawn with a running iron on the flank of the steer. Whoever had made it was an artist, for it was an excellent representation of a human skull and a pair of crossed bones. As the skin of the steer's flank stretched and puckered with the steps he was making, the skull seemed to grin and scowl.

"HOW does it look to you?" asked the sheriff.

"It looks like a lot of fun for me," said the other. "So long, sheriff."

"Hold on," said the sheriff. "I got a brand of whisky in the house that needs to be tasted. Come along in and try a swig of it."

They entered the house, where the sheriff did honor to his roof by pushing his hat on the back of his head. The stranger removed his entirely.

Now the sheriff indicated a great ten-gallon jug that stood in a corner. "Here's a glass," he said, giving one to Litton. "Now just help yourself, Mr. Litton. Go just as far as you like."

Litton did not hesitate. It was a ponderous stone jug, and it was brimming with liquid. Yet he did not put the glass on the table and use both hands to manipulate the great container, for he understood perfectly that the sheriff was quietly attempting to discover what amount of muscle was stored in the arm that had knocked down Jerry Deacon. Sheer effort would hardly manage the thing, and he knew that, also. Any human wrist would snap under the strain of lifting the great jug and turning it sidewise. But Barry Litton picked up the jug, gave it an easy, pendulous swing, and then quickly shifted it so that the bulky jug lay within the crook of his arm. He drew the cork.

The hardest effort of all had to be made in order to pour the liquid out into the glass in a steady stream. His whole arm and his shoulder ached with suppressed shudders as he strained to accomplish this. But he managed it. Without a tremor, a small amber stream poured out until two fingers of liquor lay in the glass.

Still he persisted in keeping the jug under his arm. "Have some yourself?" he asked.

"Sure," said the sheriff, his eyes glistening. He held out his glass, and into it fell the same slender, steady stream.

The test was not over, however. The sheriff's glass was given back to him, and after that young Mr. Litton had to swing the jug down from his arm without breaking his wrist—and place it on the floor without a jolt. He accomplished that trick.

Last of all, he had to hold the glass in his strained right hand, and drink it without letting a tremor show. This he could not do. Speed would have to cover that weakness; and so saying, "Here's in your eye, sheriff," he nodded to his host, scooped his own glass from the edge of the table with a swift gesture, tossed off the liquor, and immediately replaced an empty glass on the table.

The sheriff looked on with greater pleasure than ever. "Muscle—*and* brains," he said. "Good luck to you

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and the Dead Man Steer, brother!" Then he drank his own portion to the dregs.

CHAPTER IV.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES.

YOUNG Mr. Litton overtook Willow just as the latter was approaching the neighborhood of Pudge Oliver's place.

He said, "Tom, the time has come for us to settle down for a little while."

"Sure, I knew that, I knew that," answered Willow. "We'll settle down here in a harbor full of reefs open to the wind, with a steer called the Dead Man for an anchor to windward. Ain't that the plan?"

"That's the advantage of having had you with me so long, Willow," said Litton. "You know what's in my mind—and that's a great thing for me."

"Me?" said Willow. "I don't know what's in your mind, and I don't wanta know. I ain't such a fool that I wanta *know* the future. I'd rather keep *hopin'* about it."

"The first thing," said Litton, "is to get a place to stay here in town—somewhere on the edge of it. Next, we'll have to put in a supply of guns, because we may need some of 'em, Willow. You can see that. The people around here have an itch that only a spray of lead can cure."

Willow groaned, but made no other answer.

"You collect the horses," directed Litton, "and I'll step into the gun shop and see what they have in the way of what we want."

"Samuel Raeburn, Guns and Ammunition," was the legend that appeared above the door of the shop.

Pushing open the door, Litton stepped in and found sitting on the counter the same freckle-faced lad whom he had collared on the street, not long before. The boy's hands were idly gripping the edge of the counter, and his brown, bare legs were swinging. He looked at Litton with blank eyes.

"You the proprietor of the shop, brother?" asked Litton.

The boy's bland, deceptively innocent expression did not change as he called out, "Hey, Lou!"

A girl's voice answered, "Yes, Jimmy?"

"Come and look at," said Jimmy.

Footsteps hurried, a door was pulled open. "That worthless mongrel of yours has treed my cat again," scolded the girl in the doorway. "If you—" She paused, seeing the stranger. With eyes as blue and bright as Blue Barry Litton's eyes she looked straight back at him.

"Look at," said the boy. "This is what I wanted you to see.—This is the one that grabbed me on the street."

"I want to look at a pair of eight-bore double-barreled shotguns," said Litton to the girl, "and a couple of Winchesters."

"Yeah," said Jimmy, "I knew you'd be needing guns, pretty soon. Maybe you'll be needing a grave before long."

The girl had laid the guns on the counter in silence. But now she said, "Jim, get off that counter and go away! You're rude."

"Him and me are both rude," admitted Jimmy. "But he's the rudest. He's the one that licked Jerry Deacon, down at Pudge Oliver's."

"Jimmy, get out of the store!" exclaimed the girl.

"She's none too pleased about Jerry getting a sock on the chin," explained

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the boy, slipping from the counter and going towards a door, though at a snail's pace. "She's pretty crazy about Jerry.— That big ham!"

His sister gave him a calmly disdainful glance.

"HERE are the Winchesters," said she. "They're all the same, and all good. These shotguns are right, too," she added.

"How do you know?"

"I've used the same kind myself," said she.

He looked at the heavy guns, and then at her slenderness.

"She's pretty proud of that," said Jimmy. "She puts in about that every time she can."

A side flick of the eyes touched Jimmy, but failed to daunt him. Still he moved towards the door, and still his progress was that of a snail.

"These will do," said Litton. "I'm sure the shot guns are all right. But the rifles? Well, I'll have to try one of 'em."

She filled the magazine without a word. He felt a certain curiosity behind her eyes, but saw that she would not let it rise to the surface.

And he, thanking her, stepped to the door. "Come along, Jimmy," he said, "and show me something to shoot at."

He saw a slight movement on the part of Lou, as though she longed to be present at that testing, but he left her uninvited.

Jimmy, aggressively eager, hurried forward to open the door. In the blaze of the sun before the shop he stood beside the tall man, glancing hungrily around him.

"There!" he said.

"Where?" asked Litton.

"See that sign?— That sign that says 'Morgan and Company, Grain, Hay, and Livestock,' right there across the street?"

"Well," said Litton. "What about it? There's another sign just opposite that says 'Chaney and Company, Grain, Hay, and Livestock.' Which shall it be?"

"Take either one of 'em," said the boy. "They're hangin' by a pair of wires each. If you can shoot those wires in two, it proves that the rifle carries pretty straight, doesn't it?"

"And the signs fall?" suggested Litton, grinning.

"That doesn't make any difference," said Jimmy. "The Chaneys and the Morgans are dead pleased when anybody shoots down those signs. It gives them a lot of free advertising."

"Well," said Litton, "why not? You know, Jimmy, the way I'm fixed in this town, it won't do for me to let people think that I'm a bad shot. Because I'm not. I'm pretty good."

"Oh, are you?" said Jimmy, sneering instantly at the first suggestion of bragging.

"I'm not a champion, but I'm pretty good," said the other. "And it's only fair to let people know it."

Jimmy, with an uncertain mind, stared at the big man. Then he shrugged his shoulders, reserving judgment.

Litton, in the meantime, looked earnestly at the gleam of the heavy wires that upheld the Morgan sign. Then he lifted the rifle quickly to his shoulder.

The butt had hardly settled into the hollow of his shoulder before he pulled the trigger. The great sign swung down and hung by a single wire.

"Jumping — jiminy!" said Jimmy, under his breath. He looked up with worshiping eyes at the stranger; and, behold, as the sign swung slowly back

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and forth, the rifle spoke again, and the heavy board crashed to the ground.

Jimmy yelled with joy.

FROM the great, yawning double doors of the warehouse ran two or three men. They recoiled with shouts when they saw the figure with leveled rifle across the street. But the direction of the weapon was no longer towards them.

"If the Morgans are down," said Litton, "turn and turn about is fair play. What about the Chaneys?"

Straightaway the rifle barked twice, and the Chaney sign smote also the dust and broke in two.

Jimmy could no longer shout. His eyes were two blue and white saucers. And Litton, turning, had a faint glimpse of a girl's face, pressed so close against the front window of the store that the nose made a white spot on the pane.

He reëntered the door as Lou Raeburn was scampering to regain her place behind the counter. She was panting a little, and her eyes were dancing as he paid his bill.

"Straightest shooting rifle I ever had," said Barry Litton. "Maybe I can get some advice, here?"

"You bet you can get advice," said Jimmy, his voice a crow of ecstasy.

"I want to find a shack on the edge of town—a place to rent. A couple of rooms would do. Know about a place like that?"

"Si Turner's place," said the boy and the girl, in one breath.

"Will you show me, Jim?" he asked.

"Don't forget about ammunition," said Jimmy. "Oh, but there's gonna be a stir. The Chaneys *and* the Morgans! Both slapped in the face! Wow!" The boy who liked to kick up dust yelled with joy.

So it was that ammunition in quantity was bought.

"Have you got a lot of friends?" asked the girl behind the counter.

"Quite a few, here and there," said Litton, who was standing at the door.

"You'd better spend the night writing to them," said she. "They'd probably all like to have a farewell letter!"

"I might do that," he answered, "but I haven't any writing paper with my crest on it." He passed out to the street, with Jimmy fairly dancing beside him.

Already a crowd was gathering around the fallen signs, and more men and women and children were coming at full speed.

"You're raised a dust, all right," said the boy. "Look at 'em! By jingo, won't the Chaneys and the Morgans choke!"

Tom Willow, with the two horses and the steer, stood nearby.

"Great thunder, sir," said he. "What you been up to?"

"I was trying out a rifle," said Litton. "Which way is the Si Turner's place?" he asked of the boy.

"Right down the street, between them two fallen signs," said Jimmy.

"Go down the street," said Litton to Willow, "and we'll overtake you. Where's there a shop to buy chuck, Jimmy?"

"There's Mayberry's, across the way," said Jimmy. "They've got everything from whole sides of beef to crackers."

"We'll try Mayberry's," said Litton.

THEY crossed the street, and as they crossed, Litton called after Willow, "Step up and give Chaney and Morgan enough money to pay for putting their signs back in place, will you, Willow?"

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There was a groan from that worthy, and Litton and the boy entered Mayberry's big store.

"Look," said Jimmy, "there's everything that anybody could want, here."

"Go on and order, Jim," said his companion.

"Me? Me order?" exclaimed Jimmy.

"That's the idea. You order. Nobody knows what he wants to eat, after he gets past twelve or thirteen years old. But at that age a fellow knows exactly what he wants."

"You like jam?" asked Jimmy, wistfully. "I mean, with bread that's *thick* with butter?"

"Nothing better, now that you speak of it," said Litton.

"And sardines?" asked Jimmy.

"Yes, and sardines, of course! You go ahead and order."

"How much?"

"Why, as much as you think a pair of people would want to have around them, if they were staying a month or so."

Jimmy's blue eyes flared with joy.

He stepped to the counter. "Hey, you," he said to the clerk.

"Whacha want, Jim?" asked a yawning clerk.

"Trot out that deer that was brought in this morning."

"How much of it?" asked the clerk.

"The all of it," said Jimmy. "There's gunna be venison ate around this town, before long.—And rake down that shelf of blackberry jam. I wish that there was two shelves, but I'll take what you got.—And all the canned brownbread that's in the place, too."

"Hey, Jim, what sort of a jamboree is this going to be?" asked the clerk. "And who's gonna pay for this here?"

"This here gentleman is gonna pay for it all," said Jimmy. "I wantcha to know, boy, that a gent has struck Holy Creek who knows what *chuck* is!"

CHAPTER V.

WITHOUT WARNING.

LITTON and the boy left the store, and together they went down the street.

You coming down to Turner's place with me?" Litton asked.

"Say," said Jimmy, "what are *you* doing with the Dead Man Steer?"

"I'm keeping it for the sheriff," said Litton.

"What for?"

"I'm going to charge nickels to the boys who want to see it—except you, Jim. You're in on the ground floor."

"Nickels, eh?" questioned Jimmy. "How about bullets? Will they do? Because you're likely to get a whole flock more of them than nickels."

"I'll take whatever I can get," answered Litton. "Mind you, partner, if you walk down the street with me now, you're liable to collect a bullet or two your ownself."

"If they can hit me, they can murder jack-rabbits on the run," boasted Jimmy. "Come along!"

So they sauntered down the middle of the street.

"It makes dusty walking, here in the middle of the street," said the boy.

"It does," answered the other, "but it gives you a chance to look at the doorways behind you."

They drew near the crowd that now spilled quite across the street from the Chaney to the Morgan warehouse. And as they approached, an avenue opened up before them.

Jimmy, delighted, could not help thrusting out his chest like a pouter pigeon.

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"Something's gonna break now," he said.

"Not yet," answered Litton. "They'll need a little time to make up their minds. Anyway, we'll see how hard this town is."

"It's plenty hard," said Jimmy.

They had come to a spot midway between the two stores when a gray-headed man, big and walking with long strides, came out to them. He pointed a finger at Litton.

"You're the man who shot down that Morgan sign?" he asked.

"I am," said Litton. "I needed to try out a rifle I'd just bought, and I thought if I paid for the damage—" He was smiling gently as he spoke.

"You and your damages be damned!" said the big man. "This ain't the last you'll hear of shootin' down signs in Holy Creek!"

"Brother," said Litton, "I'm moving into the Si Turner shack, and if anybody wants me, I'll be found there at regular hours—and irregular hours, too. The Dead Man Steer will be at home there, too. Five cents is all I charge."

He drew himself up. Then, looking deliberately to the right and the left, over the heads of the others, he remarked, "But it doesn't look as though I'll collect much money in this crowd."

"Doesn't it?" demanded the other. "What do you—"

"It doesn't," said Barry Litton, "because it doesn't look to me as though there are many men in the lot of you who are *worth* a nickel!"

WITH that he strode on, leaving behind him the men who had been drinking in the scene, their eyes and ears dumfounded.

Jimmy scurried at the side of his longer-stepping companion. "Jumping jiminy!" said he. "You know who that was?"

"The gray-headed fellow? No."

"That was Rush Morgan himself, and he's the head of the whole clan," said the boy.

"Is he?" said the other carelessly. "I'm glad I've seen him, then."

"But look here!" said the boy. "If you—" He paused, unable to speak more, and looked at the load of guns carried over the bend in his companion's left arm.

Then he shook his head. "What brought you out here, partner?" asked Jimmy, filled with a deep awe and even deeper worship.

"Why," said the other, "a friend of a friend of mine wrote about Holy Creek. I thought since I was traveling this way I might as well look it up."

"Who was it that wrote?"

"A man called Pete. Red Pete. Red Pete Chalmers was his name."

"Red Pete?" asked the boy. "Why, I know about him!"

"Do you?" said Litton, with seeming carelessness.

"They bumped him off."

"Why, who killed him?" asked Litton. "Was he a bad actor?"

"He wasn't doing nothing," said the boy, "but he got in between, when the Morgans and the Chaneys met up, one time, right here in town. It happened right back there. They opened up, and he got in between. He was about the only man killed that day."

"Wouldn't the fool move when they yelled to him to get out of the way?" asked Litton even more carelessly. But his face, which was turned a trifle away from the boy, had turned a shade pale under the tan. His jaw was set like stone.

"There wasn't anybody shouting to him to get out of the way," said the

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boy. "They just opened up and blazed away at each other, and he happened to be in between."

"Yeah?" murmured Barry Litton. "Was it a Morgan or a Chaney who got him?"

"Nobody could tell," said the boy. "He was right in between. It might have been either of the lot, or both."

"Kind of hard luck for Red Pete, eh?" said Barry Litton, laughing.

There was a hard grating sound in the laughter. The boy did not notice it, however. He looked up with amazement at a man who could be so totally callous.

"YEAH, it was hard luck," said the boy. "Kind of mean luck, too," he continued, "because, like you say, you'd think that people would give a sign to folks in between, before they start in shooting."

"Yes, a fellow would think that," said Litton. "Still, I don't know. A man has to take his chances."

"Yeah. But there weren't no chances—not for Red Pete. It made me sick when I seen him spin around and drop."

"Oh, you saw it, did you?" said Litton, with an imperceptible start.

"It was close to the shop, you see," explained the boy, "and I was there near the window. I looked out and saw the shooting begin, and I saw Red Pete grab his guns as he fell."

"He went for his guns, did he?" asked the other in a faint voice.

"You bet. He had a gun in each hand as he hit the dust, but he hit the dust dead."

"That was his bad luck," said Litton.

"He was a fine big gent, too," said the boy. "He was your size, partner."

"Was he?" murmured Litton. His voice was almost inaudible.

"And he had eyes about like yours—mighty blue," said Jimmy.

"Yeah?" drawled Litton. He gave a sudden shrug to his shoulders, as though a chill had run down his spine.

"Say—he was a ringer for you," said the boy, "except that he had red hair.—I never thought of that before!"

"Yeah, I guess a lot of people look like one another," remarked Barry Litton carelessly.

"But not ringers—like him for you," said the boy. "They got him planted out in Boot Hill, and nobody but half a dozen would know where the grave is."

"Why," said Litton, "some day we might step out and take a look at it—just for curiosity, eh?"

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. MURDER.

SI TURNER'S place lay on a slight rise of ground at the end of the village, and on the way to the shack they routed out Turner himself to conduct them to the old house. He was living in a new one, now—a tall, narrow house with two stories and an attic, the attic being Si Turner's chief pride. Whenever he made a lucky strike in the hills and sold out his claim for a comfortable sum, the very first thing that he thought about was a house with an attic; for, as he explained to young Barry Litton, a one-story house was all right for a young fellow, but by the time a man had accumulated a past he needed some place to put it.

"There's my old traps, for instance," said Si Turner. "Why, some

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of them old bear traps of mine have got a history behind them. I tell you what, I can read inches deep in the rust; they are covered with fine prints for me, brother.—Then you take things like old broken snowshoes. They ain't much to look at, but some of them snowshoes, they walk me right back through times that give me a chill up the back, I can tell you. And where's there a place for 'em except in an attic? No, sir, I tell you what—a house without an attic is like a man without a memory."

The old shanty which Barry Litton had asked about was composed of two rooms, a kitchen-dining room and a bedroom-parlor. There was a stove in the kitchen; there were two bunks built against the walls of the other room. There were a few other articles of furniture, about which Si Turner made the comment, "They don't look right, sitting around the new house; and they're too good to store in the attic. So there's a good many times when I come up here and spend an hour or two fiddling around the old house, thinkin' things over.—You take and look at that 'M. W.,' carved into the side of that table, good and deep. It was carved by a good deep kind of a man. Them initials was sunk there into my table by Milton West. It wouldn't be hard to prove to my grandchildren, if I ever got married and had any, that Milt West was a partner of mine. There's things about Milt and his fights and his travels that would make a man keep on thinkin' for an hour at a time . . .

"There's other things about the house that might be you'd like to know about. There's that slice above the door. Maybe you wouldn't know that Tom O'Shay, he put that cut there with his own hand? Yes, sir, the ax he throwed didn't hit me, but it took the hat off my head and jammed it into the wall, there. Look close an' you can see some of the threads that still stick there in the crack.—You see?"

"I SEE," said Litton.

Said Si Turner: "It never would hardly be possible for me to be lonesome, up here in this shack.—There's that cobweb, d'you mind?" He pointed to a great sheet of silver silk that filled an upper corner of the ceiling.

"That's a big cobweb," said Litton. "That would be good for stopping a flow of blood."

"Well, maybe it would," said Si Turner. "I reckon that anything cobwebs would be good for, that one would be extra fine at. Well, I've seen that cobweb made and kept for eight years, partner! Yes, sir. For eight whole years she's hung there. And the old lady spider down there in the sack at the corner of the web, with her hands stretched out on her telegraph lines, waiting for news of raw meat. There's many and many a time, I can tell you, that I've sat here, of a summer afternoon, and caught flies and hoisted them up and dropped them on the web, and watched old Mrs. Murder come bustling out and grab the fly. I've listened to his poor wings sing for a second or two; and many a morning I've looked down in the corner and seen the dead, dry bodies that Mrs. Murder had heaved out of her house!

"There was a day when I seen a big hornet go whang into that nest, and bust about half of the main cables at one crash. Out comes Mrs. Murder on the run. I aimed to think that she'd cut the hornet loose before he spoiled the rest of her web; but not her. She begun to throw out films of thread, and pretty soon she got one of those wings

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of the hornet nailed down. He was still thrashin' around and tearin' things up; and finally, all that web was down except where the ruins was hanging by the ends of two or three of the main cables. It was a sad thing to see that fine old web danglin' around in the wind that the hornet kept up with his one wing.

"But by jiminy, I tell you what—Mrs. Murder, she kept at her work, and finally she got the other wing lashed; and then she went down, mighty careful. I stood on a chair and watched that hornet gnashing his teeth and sticking out his sting, like the head of a spear, and all shining with poison. A coupla times it looked to me like he was gonna put an end to Mrs. Murder; but at the last she got him, and what was left of that feller is back in my attic, glued to a bit of a card. There ain't more'n a shell left to him, and yet you can't hardly see where that old lady put in the knife!—No, sir, I never seen a better spider than her; a more keener spider, or a neater about her housework—or a brighter, or a more entertaining spider. For a long winter evening, I wouldn't know whether I'd rather spend time with old Milt West, when he was alive, or watching that spider up there. Why, she knows me, doggone her!"

He tapped the web with a straw, and out ran a long-legged, hairy horror of a spider, to pause in the very center of the web.

"There she is!—There's Mrs. Murder for you," said old Si Turner. "Ain't she a beauty?"

"She's as good a spider as I ever saw!" declared Litton, with a slight shiver in his shoulders.

"You give her a fly or two, now and then," said Si Turner, "and the first thing you know, you won't be reading your paper, of an afternoon.—You'll be cocking an eye up at that web."

SI TURNER pointed out other objects of interest on his place. He had been faced with the great question—Ought he to take electricity into the house, or not? But electricity finally had come in; and as Si Turner said, it made the house as bright as day!

This house, with all of its carved initials, its electric light, corral, shed, and spider webs, was for rent at the small figure of ten dollars a month. Barry Litton paid a month in advance. Then Si Turner shook hands, wished him luck, and wandered back down the road.

Jimmy, in the meantime, had scouted about the place and delighted himself with all that was in it.

"Here comes the grocery wagon, loaded down," said Litton. "You tell the driver where to put the stuff in here—if there's room for it all in the kitchen. I've got to go out and have a talk with Tom Willow."

"Partner," said Jimmy, "I'll have everything stowed away like in a pack—with a diamond hitch throwed onto it!"

Tom Willow had put the mule and the horse in the shed in the meantime; and the corral was left to the wanderings of the Dead Man Steer. It was a good corral, with a muddy little stream of water trickling across one corner of it, and a fresh growth of grass covering the ground. The Dead Man Steer began to graze in the most peaceful manner, while Barry, his new guardian, looked down upon him with thoughtful interest.

Both the Morgans and the Chaneys had been slapped in the face on this day; and now the steer was virtually a

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red rag that would flap in their faces. Barry Litton was more and more pleased as he considered this matter.

From among the many boxes sent up from the grocery store he selected the smooth, pinewood sides of two, and upon these he wrote in large letters:

TRESPASSERS BEWARE ! ! ! ! ! !

Underneath, he wrote in smaller letters:

Anyone encroaching upon this ground without permission does so at his own risk.

Barry turned to Jimmy, who had just finished storing and stacking the provisions in the kitchen. "Hey, Jim!" he said, "come here a minute, I've an errand in town for you."

"Yeah?" said Jimmy, dimly, speaking around a mouthful of fig cookies that distended his jaws grotesquely.

"Will you run down to the sheriff and ask him if he has any objection to my shooting trespassers after I've put out these signs?"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

Plane Parking in the Arctic

"G-CASK" are the license letters of one of the most remarkable airplanes in Canadian aviation. It was while flying from Baker Lake, on the west shore of Hudson Bay, to Bathurst Inlet, over practically uncharted territory, that a snowstorm came up, forcing G-CASK and a companion ship down at Dease Point.

A gale was blowing by the time the two ships arrived at Dease Point, not far from the magnetic North Pole, which made the use of a compass impossible. Even the sun compass carried failed to function for the ships, because heavy snow obscured the sun from sight. This was in September, 1929. Lack of gasoline, because the machines had flown so far off course, made it imperative that one ship be abandoned and the party fly to Bathurst in the other. G-CASK was left behind. It was run up on shore under its own power, despite the fact that it had pontoons and not wheels, it was tied down to the rocky ground, its engine bundled up in the regular engine covering, and left to weather the Arctic winter, drifting sea-fogs, salt spray, blizzards, and the sun of the twenty-four hour Arctic short summer days.

In August, 1930, G-CASK was sighted by a plane sent to salvage the ship. Apart from a little rust there were no signs of damage, even the floats being in perfect condition. The engine was checked over and started up without any difficulty. The machine was taxied down the rocky shore on its pontoons to the water within two and a half hours of the arrival of the salvage plane. The following morning, after sitting for eleven months uncovered to the Arctic winds and weather, it was flown to McMurray in northern Alberta. Even the battery was in good condition when the ship was found.

James Montagnes.

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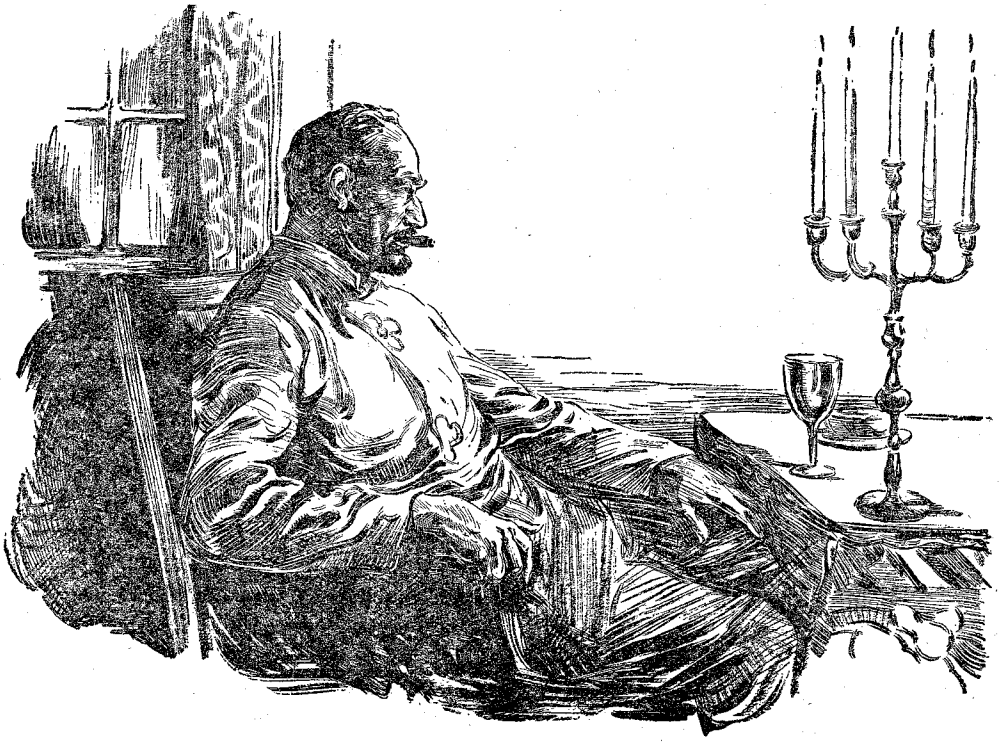

The Man-Hunter

By H. BEDFORD-JONES
Author of "Château of Missing Men," "Buccaneer Blood," etc.

Livingston had trailed his man in worse places than the Lower California mountains—but never a man guarded by ghosts

CHAPTER I.

HOT BLOOD.

THAT guide of mine, Pedro, was the worst sort of rascal. They warned me about him before I left La Paz. When the *jefe* went over my papers and signed my rifle permit, he dropped a hint—after his own fashion, of course.

"Señor Livingston, I grieve to see you depart with that man Pedro. Our country is wild, and it would pay you to wait a week or so, when I could procure you a better guide."

"I can take care of Pedro, thanks," I told him. "He's the only man in La Paz who knows the Three Virgins country, and I've met bad men before this. That's my business."

"Assuredly," said the *jefe*. "It is certain that Pedro knows the country."

He took me for a bull-headed gringo, but as a matter of fact I did not dare wait a week or two. If I did, Bannister would certainly learn that I was here. Strangers at La Paz, outside the pearling season, are few and far between. Even if Bannister lived in the midst of the most God-forsaken desert

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"There are no cartridges in it," he heard Bannister say mockingly

on earth he would hear about me. My only chance to get him was to strike hard and fast. Two years back, in Honduras, I had missed him in just that fashion—by delaying my stroke. Then Bannister dropped completely out of sight. Now I had him, and I meant to get him.

So I left La Paz with my friend Pedro, swarthy, agile, hard as nails, and with two mules. The Three Virgins were ahead of us now, their empty volcanic cones hard and ash-white against the blue sky, and about us was a blasted region. Not even cactus grew here. Nothing but naked rock, though Pedro declared we would find cactus enough ahead.

Pedro made no trouble. I can be a pretty hard-boiled sort of person myself, when necessary, and he knew it. Also, I was no tenderfoot. I had trailed other men before this; as I say, that was my business. The chief operative for the Bankers Protection, Incorporated, has to know his onions—or die quickly.

Detective? No, not a bit of it. I merely ran them down after the real detective work was done, and I am not one of these duty hounds, either. For instance, I let Pearling go, after nabbing him in Morocco, because I felt sorry for the poor devil, and because I found he was not to blame. I also got Wasserman off, after bringing him back from Peru, by my evidence. But Bannister—ouch! Bannister was just a high class, cold-blooded thief. He got clear with a cool million and a half, all trust funds, and all belonging to a bunch of women who had organized—widows, mostly, made so by the war.

I can see why a man will steal from

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a bank, why he'll wreck a stock company, why he'll even rob himself, as some do. But the man who cleans out a crowd of veterans' widows and kids, is about the lowest thing on two legs, in my opinion. That's why I had made it a personal matter to get Bannister. And here he was, out in the middle of Lower California, under the name of Epstein, pretending to be a German scientist. I had the goods on him, right enough. He had been here for two years, after giving me the slip in Honduras.

On the sixth night out I had a talk with Pedro. We were at a tiny water hole, nothing but that naked volcanic rock all about us; and the glass-like trail had ripped my boots to pieces. When a trail will do that in six days, you know how bad it is. Pedro wore the soft leather sandals of the peninsula, which will last longer.

"Let us confer seriously, Pedro," I said, when we had finished our supper. The tips of the Three Virgins were ominously red in the sunset. "Just how far is San Xavier Cañon from here?"

Pedro shifted his *serape* to the other shoulder and spoke through his cigarette. "Two days, *señor*."

"Then we'll have plenty of water, leaving here. Do you know Señor Epstein?"

Pedro did not. "It is three years since I have been to San Xavier," he said. "I hear that a man is there, yes. In the ancient days, the fathers had a mission there; but the Indios have died out, and now everything is in ruins. Is the *señor* a friend of Señor Epstein?"

"Even as a brother," I said solemnly. "I bring him good news from his friends."

At last I got Pedro to draw a map in the dust, and he did not have sense enough to do it wrongly, though he tried. However, I got the truth out of him before we finished. He was a sullen rat, this Pedro, unshaven and dirty and with long black mustaches; but his rifle was kept clean. This was significant. It should have warned me, but it did not.

Morning saw us stumbling on behind the mules, across that waste of lava and obsidian, always climbing imperceptibly to the upland beyond. Now began to appear the distorted shapes of yucca cactus, Joshua trees lifting agonized arms. Here and there, where cañons ran into the distance, mesquite and smoke-bush became evident. A hot, intensely dry breeze swept down from the Three Virgins, sapping the moisture out of our bodies.

NOON came. The sun was white-hot, blinding, its terrific downpour of heat radiated back a thousand-fold from the rocky waste around. In such heat a man could go mad quickly, could act on sudden frightful impulse, could do anything.

Pedro halted the mules and beckoned to me. He pointed past the westernmost of the Three Virgins, and I saw a little red knob of rock in the distance.

"On the north side of that red hill, *señor*, is San Xavier," he said, thick-tongued. "Much cactus about, all kinds. It is like a forest. To-morrow night we get there, for it is far—"

He paused suddenly, reached forward, and jerked his rifle from beneath the straps of the nearest mule. He fired quickly, and uttered a low cry of exultation, then shambled forward. I saw him pick up the jack rabbit he had knocked over. He set his mouth to the still quivering body. After a moment he lowered it, and blood showed on his

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face. He had been drinking the warm blood!

That disgusted me. He returned to where I stood, and a dozen feet away dropped the rabbit. Then, without a word, without warning, he threw up his rifle and fired pointblank.

The bullet knocked me sprawling, striking me squarely over the heart. I dared take no chances on a second bullet. Coming to one knee, I whipped out my pistol and shot twice. Pedro crumpled up, in the very act of firing again. Probably he had never heard of a bullet-proof vest.

There was nothing to do for him; both bullets had gone home. I toiled hard, piling up some loose rock above his body, and so left him. Despite this inconvenience, however, I did not remove the vest—it looked like any other vest, and I wore it in place of a coat. This was not the first time it had saved my life.

All this is but the prologue, as it were. You will observe that there could be no mistake whatever about Pedro being dead, exceedingly dead. And no one had observed the happening. We were alone, and in the midst of a frightful desert, beneath a brazen sky, long days' travel from any inhabited spot.

I plodded on with the mules across the trackless waste, hoping that Pedro had not lied about the location of San Xavier.

CHAPTER II.

STRANGE WELCOME.

PEDRO had not lied, but it was close to sunset when I came down into San Xavier Cañon.

I was a frightful looking object, unshaven for a week, my shoes and garments in rags, my old Stetson flopping over my eyes. That was as I wished, for while Bannister did not know me by sight, I was taking no chances on the unknown.

Making the red hill, which proved to be a long hogback of volcanic rock, I could gaze down upon the cañon, which proved surprisingly wide across, running off to the northwest. As Pedro had said, it was a veritable forest of cactus. I had never seen or imagined anything like it.

After the winter rains, when the cactus was in flower, this must have been a glorious sight; but the flowers had gone months ago and all was dry and barren. Here were immense fluted columns of the *saguaro,* blackish and spiked, towering to seventy feet or more; the graceful *milapa,* nearly as high; dense clusters of gray ocotillo poles, and beneath these the cylindrical barrel cactus or *viznaga,* huge brownish *cardones,* cat-claw brush, cholla, and various kinds of yuccas.

Sight of all these in one spot astonished me, until I realized that they must have been gathered here originally by human hands, perhaps by the old *padres.* From the hillside, to which a distinct path had led me, I perceived that this apparent jungle of thorns was really broken by gullies and rocky arroyos. Only in the rainy season could there be much water in this wide, rocky cañon. From where I stood, the path plunged down into the jungle, and in the midst of it all, a quarter-mile away, I discerned the red tiles of a roof.

I followed the path, and the mules were willing enough, for they sensed water ahead. In five minutes the mass of brown and gray claws had closed about me, but the path held clear. No living creature had been in sight from the hill.

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Here in this grotesque jungle the heat was terrific. The long, thorny ocotillos seemed to squirm like reptiles under the bitter sunlight. Reptiles, indeed, could hardly have endured this sun for two minutes without perishing. Only the white lizards, with their spiny backs looking like miniature dinosaurs, could find this downpour of sun a pleasant thing.

The shimmering, weaving ocotillos, with their fierce, hard thorns, fascinated me. They were all around, in multitudes. The path, while wide enough, was cut off from any sight of what lay ahead, until I descried the mass of a grayish stone building with the red roof tiles which I had seen before. Oddly enough, the forest of cactus went up close to it, surrounded it, extended on the farther side. This was abnormal.

The building was large. Masses of stone lay about; and surveying it carefully, I realized that it was an old structure rebuilt, and not so long ago either. Undoubtedly, Bannister had put it into shape for his own use, from the ruins left by the *padres*. Therefore he was not alone here. He would not be alone, naturally.

With a tinkle of their bells, the mules passed on around the house. I hobbled up to the massive door and pounded at it. Even with the sunset, there came no cooling breath here, for until midnight heat would pour out of the sun-soaked rocks all about.

The rasp of a bolt being shot back came to me, and the door was swung open by Bannister himself. Although he had grown a mustache and a chin-tuft, I knew him instantly from his pictures; a tall, powerful fellow, sun-hardened, with slits of eyes and a hawk nose. Predatory, cruel, but keenly intelligent.

"Good day, *señor*," I mumbled in Spanish. I had purposely drunk no water all afternoon, to make my voice thick. "Water! I've been lost for two days—guide tried to murder me, but I got away. I found a trail that brought me here—"

"Hello! You're no Mexican!" exclaimed Bannister in English, and threw open the door. "Come in, partner! The house is yours, as we say down here. American?"

"Sure. Simpson is the name," I said. "Thought you were Mexican.—Got any water?"

"Come along," he said. "I am Dr. Epstein. We'll take care of you. Those your mules that went around? All right. Gomez will see to them. Come along. When will you fool prospectors learn not to wear boots? Well, we've got plenty *teguas*, and water enough. Got a room all ready for you. That's service, eh?"

I was surprised to find only a narrow little passage inside the door. It turned sharply to the left, running along the outside wall of the building, and we passed no doors on the other side. At the end of this singular corridor, Bannister flung open the door of a room and waved me in.

IT was not a large room. It held a cot, a table, chairs, a washstand ready with clean towels—everything neat and clean, with curtains over the windows. On the table were some American magazines and a recently published book.

"You're okay now, Simpson," said Bannister from the doorway. "Drinking water you'll find in the *olla* at the window. I'll send Gomez with some *teguas* and a clean outfit. Anything you want out of your packs?"

"No, thanks," I said, reaching for the *olla* that hung before one of the windows.

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"Then take an hour's rest, and we'll rouse you at seven, for dinner."

He departed, closing the door after him, as I was gulping at the water with a very real thirst. Then I stood looking around, considering my course. Shave? No. Best to clip the beard and leave it. Bannister was smart, and he might have gotten hold of a picture of John Livingston somewhere. The name of Simpson, however, which also appeared on my permits and documents, would mean nothing to him. Better take no chances. I had my man all right, but I also wanted as much of his loot as I could grab. Those war widows needed it.

Painfully, I got my bandaged feet out of the remnants of my boots, and was stripping off my vest and my tattered garments when a knock sounded at the door. At my word, it opened to admit an almost black *peon* who bore a tray with limes, tinkling pitcher and glass. He also carried a pair of the usual hide sandals, and a folded pair of pyjamas of bright yellow silk.

"The mules are safe, *señor*," said Gomez. "And I will clean the rifle, which is dirty. The *señor* sends you limes and ice, and these garments. At seven I will call you."

Something about the man struck me as being queer. He spoke without animation, listlessly, with no expression in his face; his eyes looked dull and dead. Then I saw an enormous purplish scar clear around the dark throat. When he went out I stared after him, feeling slightly shocked in a way hard to describe.

I enjoyed a good wash-up, clipped my beard into trim lines, and turned to the pitcher. In it was ice and water. I noticed that three or four of the limes had been cut in half, but that suggested nothing to me except the thoughtfulness of a perfect host. Lighting a cigarette I squeezed the limes into the pitcher, stirred up the contents, and poured a refreshing drink. My whole body was avid for water, after that scorching desert.

With the second glass, however, I paused abruptly. Now, perhaps, too late, I noticed a peculiar taste, not entirely of limes. Taking up the pitcher, which was of clear glass, I examined it. No sugar, no sediment, nothing wrong.

Then it occurred to me to examine the limes which I had squeezed. Why, I have no idea, unless from some lingering thought of the Borgias, those noted poisoners of olden days. The Borgia family, I recalled, had supplied the money to found certain of these old missions in Lower California, a fact which I had learned in La Paz.

The limes, I found, were slightly discolored, as though cut with a dirty knife. I smoked thoughtfully for a moment, then pulled the curtains from one of the two windows. The sun was down by this time, and the room was darkening. Across the windows were iron bars. Turning to the door, half angry at my own folly, I tried it—and found it locked!

"Nonsense!" I muttered. "The windows would be barred, in this country. And they might easily lock in any wandering drifter who showed up.—But damn it! I don't like those limes! Could Bannister have suspected anything? Did he dope me, by any chance?"

I could not believe it, for there seemed nothing wrong with me. Presently I stretched out comfortably on the bed, after donning those silk pyjamas. They belonged to Banister, as the size showed. He was a big man, but I was a trifle larger, hence they were a mite

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small in the chest for me. I put my bullet-proof vest on, beneath the jacket.

A CANDLE and matches lay on the table. As the room darkened, I rose and lit the candle. My apprehensions fled away, for I felt not the least drowsiness or feeling of having been drugged; and laughing at my own suspicions, I opened the book that lay on the table and sat down to glance at it, with idle curiosity. My own name was written on the title-page!

I stared at it, incredulous, but there was no mistake. "John Livingston, Bankers Protection, Inc.," stared back at me. I turned the page, glanced through the book. It was a dummy book, made with blank leaves. On these leaves were pasted photographs or items, cut from magazines and newspapers, all of them concerning me in some way or other. Nothing else was in the book.

With a glimmering of sense, I realized the truth. Bannister had known that I was after him, of course. He had subscribed to a clipping agency and had procured every clipping possible about me. No doubt he had a mania on the subject. Not an uncommon thing among such criminals. He had known that John Livingston would come here, some day, somehow, and so he had put this book in this guest chamber.

I smiled at that, and smiling, fell asleep. A hideous dream came to me, a regular nightmare. All I can recall of it is that I was lying out beneath the limbs of a Joshua tree. A monstrous buzzard was sitting on my chest, and presently he leaned forward and drove his beak into my cheek. The pain of it awakened me. Coming upright, I found that the man Gomez had been shaking me with one hand, holding up the candle with the other. A drop of the hot wax had fallen on my cheek. When I cursed him, Gomez shrank back, then stood staring at me with his dull eyes. Again I felt that singular horror of him; it quelled me into silence.

"*Señor,* dinner is ready," he said, in his lifeless voice.

"Very well," I replied, and rose.

The house was by no means cool; the stone walls, like the stone walls of the cañon, were still fiery from the day's sun. My pyjama garb was eminently suitable.

I looked at Gomez. "What is that mark around your neck?" I demanded. He lifted one hand to the purplish scar and regarded me with a blank expression.

"I do not know, *señor,*" he answered.

I determined that he was probably slow-witted or worse. When I signified that I was ready, he preceded me with the candle.

Wide awake now, I was laughing at my own excited imagination. There was the book on the table, of course, but that was a perfectly logical and common-sense matter, not in the least extraordinary. In passing, I glanced at the tray, and saw that the limes had shriveled about the edges. Perhaps from the heat, perhaps not. For an instant, my suspicions flared up, then died again, and I was quite myself, entirely normal in every way—or so I thought.

Out in that narrow corridor, Gomez turned sharply left. Another narrow corridor without a door. These singular halls appeared to surround some central chamber, apparently without an opening. A door showed ahead of us, covered with a heavy curtain. Gomez swung open the door, held aside the curtain for me, and I walked into a dining room blazing with soft candlelight.

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Bannister turned from the table and held out his hand in greeting. "Ah! Feeling better now, Simpson?" he exclaimed, looking me fixedly in the face as we shook hands. "Yes, more like yourself. Come, sit down. You may serve, Gomez."

"*Sí, señor amo,*" said Gomez.

Those three words startled me slightly. Gomez had called Bannister "master," which was not at all customary.

I DROPPED into a chair and looked about me with some curiosity.

The room was simply and comfortably furnished; the table was neat but simple. There was crudity on every hand, no ostentation whatever. Bannister fell to talking about the trails from La Paz, and I came alert as I gave my pre-arranged account of myself.

Yes, I had come from La Paz, seeking a bit of hunting, trying to get back health by a trip through these high uplands, and incidentally exploring a little-known country. That was after my business back home had gone to smash. My guide, taking me for a wealthy *Americano,* had tried to murder me and I had fled.

"You're lucky," said Bannister gravely, his slits of eyes glittering in the candlelight. "Others have not been so fortunate. I remember, last year, a man named Cleveland perished miserably in this desert. He was trying to explore or prospect the Three Virgins.—They are inhospitable ladies."

I felt rather cold. I had known Cleveland. He was, in fact, one of my own men, and he had been on the trail of the Denver Bank teller, Hall, who had vanished somewhere on the West Coast with his loot. No report had ever come from poor Cleveland, though Hall had been found murdered aboard a coasting steamer, his loot missing.

Gomez was serving an excellent dish of young goat.

"It's a surprise to find a man like you in this waste, Dr. Epstein," I said presently. "Surely you don't live all alone here?"

"Alone? Oh, by no means!" and he laughed in a queer way that gave me the creeps. "I have Gomez, and his wife who cooks for me, and one or two other friends here. I'll introduce you to them after dinner. I find this a fascinating place, Simpson, and well suited to my work."

"And what is that, if I may ask?"

"Experiments which might not be welcomed elsewhere," answered Bannister. His voice had taken on a metallic edge. "Perhaps you would like a bit of music with your dinner? Let us get a Los Angeles station—"

He shoved his chair back, put out his hand to a radio cabinet against one wall, and the next minute we were listening to one of the big broadcasting chains.

I mention this to show that to all appearance and feeling I was at this time entirely normal—quite myself. Yet I found myself conscious of an odd singing sound in my head. Aware of it, I thought it came from the radio, until I realized that actually it had been in my head ever since I had been wakened. It was like the humming of a bee swarm, somewhere in the house, but it was actually in my own brain. I thought again of those shriveled limes, and my heart contracted a little.

Gomez brought in coffee, pouring it from an earthen pot. I was astonished to find it so extremely weak as to be unpalatable.

Bannister was watching me with a grim smile. "You do not like my coffee, eh? Well, that is too bad, but it cannot be helped, in view of the inter-

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esting evening you are about to have, my friend."

He offered me cigars as he said these words. I took one, but I met his eyes; and in his gaze I perceived that he knew who I was. The telepathic conviction flashed into my mind, as firmly as though he himself had voiced it.

"In what way is the evening to be interesting?" I asked casually.

"I shall show you a few of my experiments," Bannister said, with an assured and confidential air.

For some intangible reason, I felt helpless, futile, powerless. True, my pistol was tucked under the waistband of my pyjama slacks, and I wore the bullet-proof vest under the yellow silk coat. None-the-less, I felt almost unnerved, somehow defenseless; and it was as though Bannister was aware of this and somehow conveyed to my brain the knowledge of his perception. He had no hypnotic gift, certainly. It was not that at all, for I was perfectly conscious of everything.

I saw Gomez come to the table, heard him utter a low word. Then Bannister laughed and knocked the ash from his cigar. "So he's come, has he? Very well. Tell him to come in here."

Gomez retired. A moment later the door opened. Into the room, holding his big straw hat in one hand, a blackened red smear of blood still over his heart, walked my late guide, Pedro!—Yet I knew that I had killed him!

CHAPTER III.

"MEET THE DEAD!"

"YOU are here to serve me," barked Bannister at him. "Now get out! Gomez will show you where to sleep and what to do. Get out!"

"*Si, señor amo,*" humbly replied Pedro, and shuffled out of the room. He, too, called Bannister "master." He, too, had lackluster eyes and a dead face—a *dead* face!

I sat there paralyzed. At the moment, nothing occurred to me except that I was looking upon the man whom I had shot; that he was walking, speaking, here in the same house with me. Yet I had left him buried under a cairn of loose rocks, back in the desert.

As I say, nothing else occurred to me just then. The portion of my brain that reasoned, that argued, that made four out of two and two, was powerless. My faculties were somehow nipped with frost.

Bannister sat sipping his coffe, those slitted eyes of his burning as he glanced at me, a half smile on his lips. My hand crept up to the pistol under my pyjama coat, then fell again. Mechanically, I lifted my cup of alleged coffee and drank it.

For an instant my brain cleared. I told myself that what I had seen was rankly impossible. Somehow, I was deluded, gripped by a phantasm of the imagination.

Then the stark, seeming reality of it all swept over me again, and the instant of clarity was gone. I knew that I was here to get Bannister and his loot. The impulse to shoot him here and now, to fire under the table, mounted and again receded. I did not want to kill him. If possible, he must be taken alive. These thoughts went through my head like waves, increasing and dying away. Certainly my brain was not normal; but I could realize that only dimly.

Presently Gomez came into the room and took some of the dishes; but at a gesture from Bannister he departed in silence. The sight of him shocked me

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anew. Was he, too, a dead man? That horrible scar about his throat—had someone cut his throat in life, then?

Bannister was leaning forward, speaking across the table to me. My perception cleared momentarily and I stared at him, drinking in his words.

"For a long time, my friend," he was saying gently, "I have been expecting the advent of a most unwelcome gentleman here. As long as he is alive, I can expect him to come. Until I know that he is dead, I shall never be free from that menace; I can never live my own life unhindered and in safety." He paused, regarding me with a curious air. "So I have been preparing for his arrival," went on his voice, soft but very piercing and metallic. "Gomez has been invaluable to me. Gomez is two-thirds Indian, one of the last survivors of the natives of this region. He has taught me much, and has aided me in my experiments. He is really most intelligent, though you might not think so to look at him.

"For example," he pursued, puffing his cigar until it glowed brightly again, "there is the local branch of the salvia or sage, which the Mexicans call *chia.* Gomez has taught me the very singular uses of these beans, especially when they are combined with other local products of the desert—especially of this cañon, so filled with cactus and other growths.

"Perhaps you have observed the weed, so like our own Jimson-weed, which is so common in the desert, with its trumpet-shaped flowers that only open at night? It is the true *datura,* my friend—that Indian plant of strange properties! Even up in the Apache country, its use is widespread in religious ceremonies. It is narcotic. It confers clairvoyance as every Indian knows. It remained for me, however, to distill a concentrated essence of this plant, and to turn it to use."

HE paused again, reflectively. I understood his words perfectly, yet I could not reason from them or connect one thing with another. My will seemed to be utterly paralyzed. At the moment, it did not occur to me to connect what he had just said with those shriveled limes on the tray. He must have known this perfectly, for his next words—a pure, unvarnished lie—were designed to make my numbed intellect believe that his infernal art had been exerted on others, instead of on me.

"So powerful are the properties of these herbs," he went on, "that by means of them I am enabled to return the dead to life, under certain conditions. You have just seen for yourself that Pedro, whom you killed, now walks and speaks and acts; he has come here, like Gomez, to serve me."

"You infernal devil!" I exclaimed hoarsely.

Bannister looked at me and smiled. "Stubborn man, eh? You refuse to believe in my powers, eh? Well, that was to be expected. You are larger and more powerful in body and brain than most men.—But it does not matter. At least, you are docile now. To-morrow you will be still more docile; in fact, you will have lost all your animosity and hatred of me, and you will serve me well and faithfully."

This infuriated me. I could not comprehend his amazing assurance, his cold-blooded deviltry. Yet he was right enough. I tried to jerk out my pistol, and only with a distinct effort, a distinct pause between brain-impulse and motion, could I grasp the weapon. Then I lifted it above the table edge.

"That's enough from you, Bannis-

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ter," I said, though I found it hard to speak. "You—you are going back with me."

He broke into a laugh. "No, my dear Livingston, I am not! And you're quite unable to hurt me with that popgun of yours. There are no cartridges in it."

I flew into a blind rage then, pulled the trigger again and again. Nothing happened. I tried to fling the weapon at him, but it only fell from my fingers on the table.

"Very singular!" he observed, cocking his head on one side and watching me. "Your brain must be unusually powerful, since it has so much resistance! You still have the impulse to attack, eh? Well, that will pass in time, and meanwhile you can do me no harm. Come! A fresh cigar; then we'll go into my experiment room, and you shall learn some other things that will assuredly interest you."

HE reached for another cigar, trimmed the end carefully, and held it to a candle.

In some corner of my brain awoke the knowledge that he was right about that desert lily being of the *datura* family, and about its odd narcotic powers and its effect upon the intellect. This was one of the most remarkable symptoms of my condition. I knew that his words were quite logical, that amazing things could be done with the desert plants, yet at the time I could not realize that anything had been done to me. My whole thought was, as he suggested, that he had worked upon others. The vision of Pedro, with his dead face, still haunted me with horror. My will had become weak indeed.

I fought desperately and frantically to keep my sanity. He had not hypnotized me, certainly, for I have tried that more than once in my life, and no hypnotist has ever succeeded in putting me under. Yet assuredly I was within his power. And all the while I felt perfectly clear-headed, knew everything that was going on—or thought I did. Looking back on it all now, I can see that there must have been a sort of reverse-English on the whole affair. It is very difficult to put it into words.

Bannister rose. "Since there need be no further pretense between us, my dear Livingston," he remarked, "suppose you come along with me."

I rose, part of my brain still fighting, yet unable to resist. I reached for the pistol, then remembered that it was empty and useless. I could not comprehend why it was empty, however; I was unable to perceive even the simple fact that the weapon must have been rendered useless while I slept.

Bannister called sharply. Gomez came into the room. In each hand he held one of those gray ocotillo poles, freshly slashed. Each was over eight feet in length. I watched him stupidly; no doubt my eyes at that moment held the same lackluster expression so evident in his. Bannister went to a curtain against one wall and drew it back, to reveal a door. Into this he set a key, unlocked it, and threw it open. Then he waited.

Gomez must have understood his rôle perfectly, for although no words were spoken he held the tips of the two ocotillo poles together and touched one of the candles to them. I comprehended that he was making a pair of torches, for I was well aware of the peculiar property of the ocotillo, commonly called candle-tree, when it is not in sap.

The blaze caught, each ocotillo tip burning with a steady, clear blaze like that of a wax candle. Lifting the two

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long torches, Gomez passed through the doorway, and Bannister beckoned me to follow.

I did not want to obey. Indeed, I tried most furiously to resist, for a frightful horror of what I might see in this place had gripped upon me. Nonethe-less, I walked over to the door and passed through, and Bannister came after, with a laugh.

"My laboratory, Livingston! I'm certain you'll find it of interest," he said. "You see, my experiments are still in progress here. There is but the single entrance. That is why I made the door extremely massive. It is impossible for anyone to batter it down. I would not like to have my specimens escape, you understand."

I did not understand at all, but was to learn all too soon.

I HAD half expected to be greeted again by the frightful specter of Pedro, but he did not appear. Oddly enough, I had not thought to inquire how Bannister knew that I had shot Pedro! This, indeed, was something that I never did learn, although I could make various conjectures in the matter.

The room, or chamber, in which I now stood was but a square rectangle, with not a single opening about the walls except the one doorway by which we had entered. It was really a laboratory of sorts, for I glimpsed work benches and apparatus, and on every side were pressed bundles of various herbs and plants.

In the ceiling, which was domed and rounded, was a large skylight of thick glass.

Despite Bannister's words and my own frightful sensations of horror, no dreadful sight met my gaze. The room was empty, one side curtained off. In the center of the floor stood two enormous sockets of cement; and advancing to these, Gomez set the ocotillo poles in them; nearby were a number of other ocotillos, ready for burning.

"You may go," said Bannister.

Gomez turned and went in silence, and behind him the massive door swung shut.

"Now, my dear Livingston," and Bannister gave me one of his hideous laughs, "you shall witness the really remarkable results of my work here!—Be at your ease, my friend."

At ease, indeed! As I watched him walk over to the curtain, the flame of desire leaped in my brain—a raging impulse to attack him, to do I knew not what. Then it was gone, as wave upon wave ebbed and flowed through my brain, leaving me powerless. The will to fight still existed in my spirit, and that was more than he had figured on.

He passed behind the curtain, and I heard his voice there, as though he was talking to someone. I glanced toward the door. With all my soul, I wanted to rush out of this room. The door was a trifle ajar so that I could see the light from the dining room, so cheerfully different from the ghastly flare of the snapping ocotillo torches! The impulse to turn and run for it rose more strongly, surged up with a powerful wave in my brain. I was almost in the act of turning when Bannister came into sight again.

"A friend of yours, Livingston!" he exclaimed, and held aside the curtain.

Another figure strode past him and into the circle of light, toward me. A fearful feeling of repulsion seized upon me. I was conscious of a foul and abominable odor that seemed to fill the whole chamber. Unutterable horror held me paralyzed, motionless, as the figure addressed me.

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"Hello, Livingston! Never expected to see you here."

I stared at the speaker. It was Cleveland, the man who had vanished last year, the man whom Bannister declared had died in these deserts! He was looking at me, speaking to me, had halted in the full light from the two faintly sputtering ocotillo torches. Certainly I could make no mistake here. I had known him well. I recognized every lineament, every feature, even his garments.

Then I became aware that his gaze was dead and lifeless, like that of Gomez. So great was my horror that the sweat started on my face and ran down in rivulets. Yet I could not move, could not utter a word.

"Aren't you going to speak to me, old chap?" Cleveland went on, in a lifeless voice that was none-the-less the voice of Cleveland.

Bannister uttered a low laugh. "Go on and talk to him, Livingston! Surely you'd like a conversation with the dead, after this length of time? Or perhaps you'd prefer to speak with someone whom you never knew?—Here, Juan Anquilla! Come out and shake hands with Señor Livingston, who is shortly to join you in your cloistered seclusion!"

Another figure came from the curtained recess. It was that of a Mexican, a handsome fellow. My brain reeled when I saw, as he came into the circle of light, that there was a bluish bullet hole between his eyes. He came straight toward me and put out his hand.

At the same instant, Cleveland turned to me. "Here, Livingston—" He, too, put out a hand.

Something snapped within me. With a frightful cry of terror, I leaped away from the touch of these dead men, struck against one of the ocotillo torches, and knocked it to the floor. As it fell, the burning end came down across my arm. The sharp, vivid pain of the burn shot through me, wakened my brain.

I saw Bannister leap forward to catch up the torch, but I was already gone, bolting for the doorway.

He shouted furiously after me. Terror lent me wings. I gained the door, shoved it open, came out into the dining room again. Then I clung to a chair, trembling, shaking in every limb, overcome by a convulsive spasm of sheer fright.

CHAPTER IV.

ON THE AIR.

WHETHER the pain of the burn had reacted on my brain, or whether Bannister's deviltry had over-reached itself by affecting me too powerfully, I cannot be certain. At all events, I was at last able to act. Upon gaining the dining room I had slammed the door and turned the massive key, though purely without volition.

When I heard Bannister hammering at the wood, faintly caught his voice coming through the door, I turned and stumbled blindly out of the dining room. Remember, I was not by any means myself. The drug smeared on those cut limes had affected some part of my brain in a powerful manner, and I knew only that a supreme terror pursued me.

Had that horrible and unearthly scene been some wild incident in my imagination? I stopped at this thought. Perhaps I was insane. Perhaps I was in a dream. I could not figure things out, but I saw the burned sleeve of the

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pyjama coat, I felt the hot sear of the scorched skin. Then I found that I had come into the kitchen of the place—a large kitchen with a lamp burning in a wall socket at one side and a wood fire going in the range. The coffee pot was simmering on the range.

Now, incredible as it may seem, I could not at this moment remember much of what had taken place. My mental processes were—and still are—quite clear to me. As I stood there looking around the empty kitchen, my one thought was of the disappointingly weak coffee which Gomez had served at dinner, and I had little thought for the horrible experience I had just been through. Here on the table stood a tin of coffee, and I seized it with a laugh of delight and dumped it into the earthenware pot on the stove. I can still recall my wild glee at the idea of teaching Gomez how to make coffee.

Undoubtedly a psychologist, or one skilled in observing mental processes, would be able to trace the queer impulses of my drugged brain and would find them very simple and logical. But as I stood there by the stove, stirring that coffee, which my whole system undoubtedly deeply craved, I can swear that I had no conscious idea except to get back at Gomez for serving such weak coffee. It did not occur to me to wonder where he was, or to fear his return.

I can even recall seeing, on the ledge of the window in front of me, a row of cartridges, those which Gomez had removed from my pistol. They meant nothing to me, for my brain could not trace the connection to myself. They meant simply nothing at all to me.

The coffee simmered. At one side were piled the dishes from the table, not yet quite cleared away. I picked up a cup and poured out some of the hot coffee. It was strong enough now—I can still smell the rank, acrid aroma of it as I poured the cup full.

Drinking it, hot and clear, then pouring more into the cup, I became aware of a grateful and soothing sensation impossible to describe.

Then, suddenly, I wondered why Gomez had served such a weak beverage, and I remembered Bannister's words and his manner at the time he did so. I understood that coffee, strong coffee, was the one thing my system most needed, possibly the only stimulant that would counteract the drug which had so affected my brain.

I hastily swallowed all the coffee from the pot, got more water, set it on the rapidly dying fire. Then I sank into a chair, looked around, and suddenly began to figure things out. Nightmare! Hallucination! Perhaps the sun had addled my brains a bit. These suppositions flitted through my head. Certainly there could be no reality in what I had passed through (I now remembered it all), for it was all too incredible, too monstrous to have any reality.

Then the sweat sprang out on my face again, for as though to answer my thought, Bannister's voice reached me. It came faintly enough, but clearly. He was calling Gomez with furious oaths. My head was clear enough now, and I came to my feet, almost myself once again. All fear fell away from me.

"By the Lord!" I muttered, angrily. "I don't know what's back of all this nonsense about dead men, but there's no sense to it. I'd like to see one of his precious dead men now!"

WITH a laugh, I caught up the coffee pot and gulped at the half-simmered fluid. Scalding and nauseous as the stuff was, it was what I needed. When the last of it was

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gone, I was ready for anything—and high time, too.

I set down the earthen pot, and noted two old-fashioned flat irons standing on the back of the stove. At this instant I heard a sound, and looked up. There in the doorway, standing gawking at me, was the man Gomez. He must have been outside, and so had heard nothing.

At this instant Bannister's voice came in renewed oaths and calls. Gomez heard it, recognized it. He shot a glance toward the dining room, then peered at me. A change came over his face, a contortion of swift passion. He drew a knife and came forward with a leap—wordlessly, murder in his glassy eyes.

I caught up one of the flat irons under my hand and let drive. All the furious repulsion one feels for an unclean, abnormal creature nerved my arm, although at best the flat iron was no great weight.

Gomez went backward with a crash, and I saw his foot jerk up convulsively, then become quiet. He had fallen on his own knife, though the knife, I imagine, had not been needed, for that pointed bit of iron had smashed squarely into his temple.

"And now," I said grimly, as I straightened up from my cursory examination, "we'll just get that pistol. Here's one dead man who'll stay dead a long while!"

I caught up the cartridges from the window-ledge and went back into the dining room, where my empty pistol still lay on the table. A moment more, and it was loaded again. I paid no attention to Bannister's voice, now sounding more hoarsely from the inner chamber. Taking up a cigar from the box, I lit it at a guttering candle and dropped into a chair, trying to resolve this madhouse into some sanity.

To tell the truth, I did think that the sun might have affected my brain, for no drug could explain away the things which I had seen. More terrible than anything else, of course, was the appearance of Pedro. How could it be that the man whom I was certain I had killed had come walking into this very room? This, I felt, was something to settle at once, if possible. He could not be far, and Bannister was safely stowed away for the moment.

I took the pistol, caught up a three-branched candlestick of native pottery, and set out through the kitchen to see where Gomez had been before his reappearance. He, at least, remained dead.

Passing out the rear door, I raised the candles to throw light ahead, and made out a shed in the rear, and close by. It was a portion of some old ruin, and was thatched over the top. Advancing to it, I found my own mules here, and two more beside them. Then, as I stepped into the shed, I stopped short. Pedro was here before me. His body lay on a heap of straw in one corner; and now, though I knew myself to be quite normal again, I was shaken for an instant by the sight. Only for an instant, however, for Pedro was indisputably dead, and in my opinion he would never be anything else.

Thoughtfully, I went back into the house and returned to the dining room. The radio was still playing softly, for it had been turned down. I chanced to stand before it, frowning, trying to get some clew. Then I saw a bit of paper lying on top of the cabinet. Reaching for it, I saw the figures scribbled there: "74, 9:45."

A glance at the clock on the wall showed me it was nine forty now. Could this be a clew? I sat down before the radio and turned the dial to seventy-four, and got only the *burr-r-r*

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of a power wave that carried nothing. I settled back in the chair and waited. Something was on this wave length at least.

Bannister's voice came again, with a thudding reverberation from the door, but that massive wood resisted him. I eyed the door with a grim smile. Bannister was certainly hoisting himself by his own petard, and no mistake!

SUDDENLY a second voice came into the room, this time from the radio. I turned on the volume, and the voice leaped out clearly in Spanish.

"*Señor doctor!* This is Luis Gasparo calling, *señor*. Nothing has been heard from the man whom you know. As I suspected at first, it is now certain that his name is Livingston. Since you know the route Pedro will follow, I trust all is well. *Adios, señor!*"

Silence.

I shut off the radio, feeling well satisfied with my experiment. So Bannister had known of my coming, even before I left La Paz with Pedro! Evidently that rascal did not hesitate to spend his money in assuring protection for himself. Luis Gasparo, eh? Well, he would soon be found when I got back to La Paz.

The whole thing—up to a certain point — had cleared itself logically enough by this time. Bannister had known of my coming. Either he or Gomez had come out to meet me, perhaps had spied on me and Pedro. At all events, they had brought Pedro's body in here. But why? Why, indeed, unless to have Pedro walk in upon me?

"Damn!" I rose from my chair in angry irritation. "I was drugged, and I saw things. That's the only explanation."

Then I looked at the closed door, thought of Cleveland, and broke into a cold sweat again. Impossible! Still, it had been devilishly real. I had no doubt that Gomez might have impersonated Pedro in some manner. In my mental condition, I probably would not have detected the imposture. But about Cleveland, and that other Mexican in there . . .

"Devil take it!" I said aloud, thankful for the sound of my own voice. "I'd better explore this place, see what I can learn, then grab Bannister. No use trying to think it out."

To be truthful about it, I was a bit afraid to open that door.

Instead, I set out to explore the place. There was not a great deal to it, after all, for Bannister had put most of his building work into the big central "laboratory." Aside from my own room, there were only three other rooms in the whole place. One of these obviously belonged to Gomez who, contrary to what Bannister had said, had no wife, or if there had been a woman here, she was gone now, for I saw nothing of her. The second was Bannister's sleeping room, a bare little place. There remained a comfortable, fair-sized room which he seemed to have used as study and a general headquarters.

HERE I lighted a lamp and began a thorough search. First glance showed nothing but a small desk, chairs, magazines, some enlarged photographs of desert subjects; but I knew better than to believe my eyes.

I turned that room inside out, pretty thoroughly. Bannister had been so confident about himself that he had not bothered particularly about hiding his loot. I found it in a neat hollow of the wall, covered over by one of his enlarged photographs, and I raked it all out on to the desk. The securities, the bank notes and the gold made quite

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a package to handle, and while putting it in shape for mule transport, I discovered that it was not all Bannister's loot, not by a good deal. A large share belonged to Hill, the Denver looter.

"So that's that!" I observed to myself. "The mystery of Hill's murder is now cleaned up. One crook preying on another crook, eh?—This will be good news for some Denver folks."

It was not bad news for me, either, considering the reward that had been offered for the recovery of that loot.

Taking the packages outside, I stirred up the mules, filled water bottles, packed up some grub, and got two of the ornery beasts loaded. A third I made ready for myself, by putting a pad upon the beast, for my feet were in tough shape. The fourth mule got away and bolted headlong into the cactus forest. And like a fool, I let him go. With the three all ready, I came back into the house and passed into the dining room, where the candles were now burning low.

As the smart of my burned arm assured me, the last vestiges of any drug had been swept out of my brain. There was no danger now that any hallucinations, visions, suggested nonsense, or whatever it might have been, would recur to me!—In fact, the discovery of Pedro's body had suggested another theory. It was possible that Bannister might have been keeping the bodies of Cleveland and that Mexican, Juan Anquilla, in mummified condition, and that just when I had seen the bodies I had been especially susceptible to the notion that they were alive and speaking. While not wholly satisfactory, that explanation seemed plausible.

"Well," I thought grimly, as I approached the door, "this thing will be settled here and now. The fact that Bannister so carefully had the cartridges taken from my pistol shows that all this spooky work really can be dissipated by bullets.—And it will be, too!"

None-the-less, I confess that a shrinking hesitation seized me as I touched the massive key in the lock of the door leading to the inner room. The bare thought of Cleveland unnerved me. Would I see him come stalking out?—Speaking, moving, acting like a living man? With an oath of disgust at my own fears, I turned the key and pulled the door half open.

"All right!" I exclaimed angrily. "Come and get it, blast you!"

Although I was confident that Bannister carried no pistol—which would have shown plainly had it been on his person, since he wore only pyjamas—I skipped back out of any angle of fire, my own weapon ready. The ocotillos had burned out. The room behind the door was dark, impenetrable.

Then I heard a step, caught sight of a moving figure, and jerked up my pistol.

"Come along, Bannister! You're done!" I said.

It was not Bannister, however, who came out. It was Cleveland. His dead eyes were fastened upon me, and the corpse-like pallor of his features was horrible to see.

CHAPTER V.

KILLED BY A DEAD MAN.

ALL of the fearful horror I had previously felt came rushing back upon me. I stood there for a long moment in paralyzed inaction, doubting my own senses, my own san-

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ity. An overwhelming panic laid hold upon me.

No mistake about this! Cleveland moved like an automaton. He halted, and then spoke to me. I could see the facial muscles move. His voice was as dull as before, but it was his voice.

"Hello, Livingston! You can't run away from us, you know. Don't try it."

Another step, slow and scuffling. I tore my eyes from him and looked at the doorway. It was the Mexican, Juan Anquilla, who now came into the circle of light. He, too, was looking fixedly at me. He did not stop, like Cleveland, but came straight toward me, with a steady shuffle that was unnerving in the extreme, as though nothing could halt his progress.

"Come with us, *señor,*" he said softly.

"Stop!" I cried out, backing away against the table. "Stop, both of you—!"

Cleveland put out his hand, stepped toward me. At this instant came the voice of Bannister from the obscurity behind: "All right—seize him, both of you!" it ordered. "Jump at him!"

With indescribable horror, I saw Anquilla gather his muscles and hurl himself directly at me. Cleveland followed suit. I fired twice, as Anquilla leaped. A frightful, strangled scream burst from him. The explosions reverberated from the rafters. Then he hurtled into me full tilt, a lifeless thing, striking against me as he fell forward.

He knocked me back bodily against the table. It came to the floor with us, crashing and splintering, sending the candles into darkness. Only a single lamp in a wall-socket continued to light the room. Something seized my wrist as I struggled to get away from that horrible contact. I knew that Cleveland had my arm with both hands, was trying to wrench away the pistol. The touch of his cold fingers inspired me with fresh horror.

At the same time, everything came clear to me. With a shock, I realized fully that after all he was a living, breathing man. I could feel his panting breath in my face; I could smell the rank odor I had observed in that chamber of horrors.

"All right, master!" rang out his voice. "I have him!"

He had me, sure enough. The pistol was gone, and I lay half under him, the body of the dead Mexican across my legs, pinning me down, holding me wedged against the ruins of the table. Cleveland was clutching my right wrist in both hands, uprearing above me, having knocked away the pistol as he wrenched it from me.

Bannister came into sight from the doorway. "Hold him, Cleveland!" came his voice, as he peered forward, trying to see exactly what was happening by the dim light.

THEN my moment of supine weakness was past. Strength came flooding back into me with a tremendous surge; the strength of frantic desperation, of angry realization. I was dealing with actual, living human beings after all, and the knowledge galvanized me into sudden activity.

With a surging heave, I unseated Cleveland. His flabby, clammy fingers slipped from my wrist, just as Bannister caught up a pottery candlestick and dashed it down to brain me. I writhed aside, and the weapon shattered on the floor by my head. I reached out, caught Bannister's ankle, and pulled him down with a jerk. As he fell, his voice leaped out in a furious oath.

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Then I was clear of them both, frantically throwing myself sideways, away from them.

Coming to one knee, groping for support, my fingers touched a broken leg of the table. I caught it up, just as Cleveland recovered and jumped for me. I smashed him over the head with one sweeping blow, and he went down like a log. The weapon flew out of my hand. I came erect, and then staggered backward under a tremendous crack on the jaw as Bannister came at me like a wild cat.

Then I had my hands full and no mistake. The man was hard as nails. So was I, for that matter. But he was fighting like a madman, regardless of my blows. Time after time my fists drove into him; but he only shook his head and bore in, hitting hard and fast and furiously.

He drove me back and back, until I saw one corner of the room behind me. Then, with my back against the wall I suddenly brought up one foot and let him have it in the chest, full force—a shove, r a t h e r than a kick, with all the purchase of that solid wall behind me.

Bannister went flying backward. He lost his balance and went headlong into the ruins of the table. Cleveland, who was in the act of rising, fell on top of him. And for a long moment everything was quiet.

I had lost all idea now of taking Bannister in alive. If I myself was able to get back alive, I would be doing well.

I realized that it would be best to tie Bannister up while I had the chance; and with this in mind, I started forward.

Abruptly, Cleveland came to his feet, and the sight halted me where I stood. For he did not come alone, but brought Bannister with him. Brought him up limply, hanging there, gripped about the throat in both hands, his tongue protruding—throttled to death in the hands of a man who was to all outward appearances quite dead. And that was the end of Bannister. Cleveland, however, was by no means dead.

Out of these most horrible occurrences evolved the one supreme fact, as I presently established to my own satisfaction. My bullets, right enough, had killed Juan Aquilla—a man about whom I was never able to learn anything definite. But Cleveland, at my shocked command, obeyed me with docile passivity, dropping the body of Bannister and standing quite still.

One by one the facts righted themselves. Aquilla, the Mexican, had not borne any bullethole between his eyes at all; that was merely a bluish powder scar from some old accident. And Cleveland, far from being the walking corpse which I had so wildly imagined, was very much alive. He and Aquilla both—and possibly the man Gomez as well—were merely victims of Bannister's diabolic experiments with the *datura* infusion.

Bannister, with his excellent private intelligence system, had known all about Cleveland, and had trapped him. Then, keeping him here for the past year, had turned him into a docile slave by means of his infernal drug.

The hell of it was, however, that Cleveland had to ride that spare mule back to La Paz, while I walked. By the time we got there he was still pretty shaky, but he was recovering, thanks to a steady diet of strong coffee.

For all I know, Bannister's hell-haunted house still stands there, with its dead, beneath the Three Virgins.

THE END.

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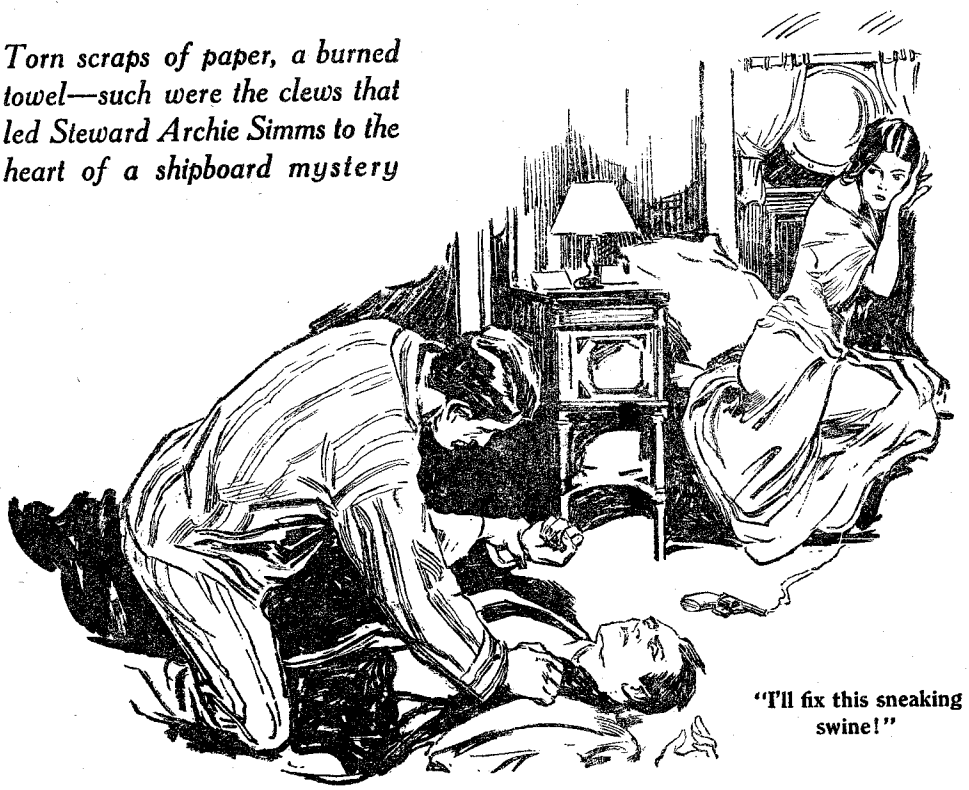
The Affair in Cabin Twelve

By JAMES WARNER BELLAH

Torn scraps of paper, a burned towel—such were the clews that led Steward Archie Simms to the heart of a shipboard mystery



"I'll fix this sneaking swine!"

THE racing shadow of the afternoon plane from Guernsey skimmed the surface of Southampton Water and wrinkled in the wake of the liner that was making its slow way out to the Channel and Cherbourg. Strange things, liners. Small worlds in themselves, moving in well defined orbits, gathering the threads of many lives and knotting them loosely, for a week, into a new entity that, however insignificant, remains in the mind. "That time I crossed on the Mauretania—"

Archie Simms, standing in the after gangway of "C" Deck, breathed deeply of the clean sea air and thrust back his old shoulders in a quiet ecstasy that always came to him for a brief moment when the tugs and the shouting and the dirty harbor waters lay well behind and the first gentle push and thrust of good blue water shouldered the keel. It was smell mostly—that ecstasy. A smell of cleanly scrubbed rubber, newly polished brass, clean crisp linen, freshly baked bread in the lower gangways, warming oil perhaps, from the engine room ventilators, wet coiled manila on decks scraped clean of shore muck—the thousand and one smells of a liner reborn to freedom.

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Brophy, the Second Class barber, came and stood at his elbow.

"Well," he said, "this is my last trip, I can tell you. Next time she leaves Southampton, Al Brophy will be snug and comfy ashore with the Missus and a neat little shop on Donover Street, and drinkin' your health in a pint of draft."

"We'll be passin' the Needles in arf a mo'," suggested Archie Simms.

"Blinkin' Needles! Nope—it's too narrowin'. Southampton, Cherbourg and New York. New York, Cherbourg and Southampton, with nothing exciting to break the monotony but seasick dames and poor tips. You better quit before you're too old to do somethin' else."

"Maybe," said Archie Simms.

"Nothing ever happens to keep a bloke interested—there're your blinkin' Needles."

They marched solemnly into the liner's wake to port—three great slices of rock candy wading out into the sea that frothed white and churned about their feet. Archie Simms liked the Needles for some reason he could never hope to explain in words and he always made it a point to clock the time out to them and in from them. It was a harmless game he played—but it was quite important in his mind.

"Well," he said, "I'll be getting along." He climbed up to "B" Deck and taking a bundle of towels from the linen locker, started his rounds. Cabins Nine, Ten, Eleven, and Twelve were his by right of seniority and fine pickings they were, too. Joseph Perignoli, the hotel man, had had them *en suite* last crossing—a cool hundred dollar tip, if you please, and "Thank you, Steward." A little by-pass passage running athwartships led in to them from the Smoke Room passageway and led out again into the starboard gangway so they could be closed off into a unit. Each had its dressing room and its bath—more work but worth it, when you were gettin' on a bit and the Missus kept talkin' about a chicken farm, incessant-like.

Croker from the Smoke Room, with a tray in his hand, came down the passage, a grin on his face.

"Fifth time since we left," he said. "Number Twelve—he takes a double brandy and Schweppes each time and gives me a shillin' each time I bring 'em. If we was only a P-and-O'er I'd retire and live on the income before we made Aden, I would. Must be storin' up a supply so he won't go dry in the States."

"Must be," said Archie Simms.

HE followed Croker into the passage and tapped on the first door to the right—Number Ten. There was no answer. He opened the door with his key and went in. The room was heavy with a cloying perfume. He left the door on the hook and opened the ports to clear the air. Women did that sometimes—he knew the trick—put it on thicker at sea, they did, when the breeze was fresh—so it'd last longer.

He picked up a small pair of gray suède shoes that lay one upon the locker-top and one across the cabin, half under the wardrobe, and placed them side by side under the bed. That kind of woman. Funny how silly people are. Expensive cabins and shoes with a tiny little break in one sole. Or maybe it had just gone through and she was finished with them. He glanced at the luggage on the racks. You could tell a lot of things from luggage, if you'd a mind to, you could. It was like people, luggage was. It could be comfortable

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and set in its ways or it could be shifty-eyed and nervous like a pickpocket. Sometimes it seemed like luggage sort of took on the character of the people it belonged to. Funny, things like that, when you come to think about 'em.

It was good luggage but old and the handle of the hat box had been mended with coarse waxed thread—a cheap job. Archie Simms sighed for his tip and picked up the coiled lengths of a pair of gray silk stockings that lay inside out on the floor beside the bed. The toe of one of them had been hurriedly and awkwardly darned with white thread. He dropped them across the foot of the bed.

"Oh, well—maybe just careless-like. You never know till they come to go off." He hung up his towels and went out, locking the door behind him. The small card on its center panel read, "Mrs. A. H. Inglis, New York." He went next door to Cabin Nine. The card on that door read Mr. A. H. Inglis.

Archie Simms racked the towels, unlocked the connecting door and flicked at a smudge of cigarette ash on the carpet. The butt, burned to the varnish on the edge of the chest of drawers, he put carefully in his dust pan.

"Careless people," he snorted and crossed to knock on the panels of Number Twelve. There was no answer. He opened the door.

A young man without coat or waistcoat lay upon the bed with his black and white silk braces shrugged off his shoulders and dangling overside from his trouser top, his collar open and the knot of his cravat slipped until it lay upon his third shirt button. The lids of his slightly puffy eyes were closed and his lips hung loosely open. He was snoring pettishly and mumbling in his sleep.

From force of habit, Archie Simms muttered, "I beg your pardon, sir," and went out, closing the door softly behind him. The card in the small brass frame read, "Mr. Barry George, New York."

"O-ho," thought Archie Simms. "Mister George agyne—that's good. Been 'avin' a bit of a rough time larst night, I sh'd sye. Well, we'll get 'im out of that directly. A fine young man, Mister George. I mind 'ow 'e always hexercises 'is own dogs an' feeds 'em hisself instead o' lettin' the butcher do it. Rich enough, too—a barth now in an hour or so and a bit of Hangostura wiv an egg and soda and we'll 'ave Mister George as roight as ryne an' thank you, for 'is dinner."

Footsteps were coming rapidly up the passage.

"THIS Mr. George's cabin?" It was a steward with a glass and bottle of Schweppes on a tray.

"He's asleep."

"Makes no difference. He rang for it—and here are his chits for the past six drinks—to sign. We've got to close up before tea."

"New orders?"

"Never mind." The steward tapped briefly and entered. Archie Simms went into Cabin Eleven. Eleven was riding empty saving a last minute booking from Cherbourg. Archie Simms sat down in one of the deeply upholstered chairs and pulled out his package of gaspers—ten for tuppence ha'penny. He lit one and leaned back to enjoy it heartily. Some ten minutes later when he finished, he opened a port, fanned the smoke out, flicked at a speck of ash and, taking the dead butt with him in his pocket, went out and closed the door. As he leaned down to turn the key, he saw a white coat flash into Cabin Ten.

"'Ere! Who's this goin' into my

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cabins wiv a key?" He walked across quickly and turned the knob. The door was locked. He rapped sharply.

"Who's there?"

"It's Simms—that's 'oo it is—open up!"

The door opened suddenly and Archie Simms was confronted by a lady in a toque and a loose deck coat of camel's hair, open in front. She was smoking a cigarette man fashion and talked without taking it from her mouth. Behind her with his back to the door stood a man in dress trousers, struggling apparently with a refractory collar.

"What do you want?"

"Why—I'm the steward—I—is this your cabin, ma'am?"

"I'm Mrs. Inglis, if that's what you want to know. We have Nine and Ten."

"Yes, ma'am. I must have been mistyken. I thought one of the other stewards had gone in 'ere wiv a pass key. It's not allowed, it ayn't."

"You must have been mistaken. No one has been in here." Mrs. Inglis closed the door.

"Strike me," said Archie Simms. "It must be hastigmatics in me eyes." He moved off down the passage to go below for his tea. "Blyme though—funny to be dressin' fer dinner at arf parst four."

Croker, the bar steward, was leaning against the serving counter in the pantry, drinking his tea and dipping a large hand into a tin of Huntley-Palmer biscuits by an arrangement he had with the pantryman who, in his turn, liked a nip of Gordon's now and then and a spot of brandy before he went to bed.

Archie Simms drew his hot water from the tank and, choosing a fresh pot from the shelf, ripped open two cloth balls of tea and poured the water over the leaves.

"No bloomin' tyste of cheese cloth in my tea."

Croker laughed.

"Bloomin' haristocrat!" said Archie. "You'll be 'avin' a cabin to yourself, next the Old Man's soon, I suppose, wot wiv closin' the bar for your tea time and assistants and what not."

"Who's closing wot bar?"

"That's what your man told me."

"Wot man?"

"The one as brung the latest bit of refreshment to Cabin Twelve."

"We've got no one in the afternoon watch—and the bar ain't closed as I know of. Leastwise it was open five minutes ago. Jack must 've got one of the cabin stewards to help after I left."

"Did you only leave five minutes ago?"

"S'help me."

"Well, that's funny. Was Jack peggin' Mister Barry George's chits or was he signin' each one as you brought the drinks?"

"Signin' each one he was. It's the only safe way with a thirsty man. They forgets otherwise."

Archie Simms shook his head. "Must be goin' off my conk," he said. "'Ere—hands out of that biscuit tin for 'arf a mo'—I'm 'avin' some myself, thank you—and jam."

WHEN Archie Simms climbed up to "B" Deck again, the buzzer was going full blast and the indicator stood on Twelve. He hurried along to Mr. George's door, tapped and opened it.

Mr. George was sitting somewhat disconsolately upon the edge of his disordered bed.

"First," said Mr. George, "I want

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the barber—and I want him right away. Secondly I want a warm bath. Thirdly I want the bar steward, and fourthly I want to know what you did with my revolver and what kind of a way you think that is to lay out dinner things. Hello — it's Archie Simms again, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir, Mister George—an' very glad to 'ave you aboard agyne, sir, for a passage. And beggin' your pardon, sir, I've only been in once—while you was asleep—an' I didn't lye out nothink."

"It's all the same to me." Mr. George waved the argument aside. "Some one did, not twenty minutes ago, and a sloppy mess they made of it. Look at it. And no barber yet—and no bath—and where's my revolver?"

"I really don't know, sir."

"Well, can you get that other steward and find out?"

"Other steward? I'm the steward here, sir."

"I know you're the one here. But get the one that was here before. See here, I know I'm a bit peeled, but so would you be, Archie Simms, if you had gone through what I've gone through the last two days." Mr. George placed a gentle hand on his forehead.

"Yes, sir—but the revolver—"

Mr. George laughed. "It's not loaded. It's a superstition merely, but it happens that I carry my studs and links in the holster—and it's gone and so are they. Find it."

"Yes, sir, I remember you do now, sir—and the barber." Archie Simms backed hurriedly into the passage. His heel struck something as he closed the door. He stooped and picked up a small holster of oil-rubbed sole leather.

"Beg pardon, Mister George—but 'ere it is outside the door."

"Now, how in—?" The young man scratched his head. "You don't suppose I was playing cowboy, do you?"

"It's light, sir, for a revolver, I should think." Archie Simms handed it over.

"Light—I should say it was—the gun's gone. Now, that's a mess, isn't it?" Mr. Barry George upended the holster and let a small cascade of studs, collar buttons and links trickle into the palm of his hand. "Oh, well, I suppose I've got it coming to me. Are you married, Archie Simms?"

"Yes, sir—quite 'appily as such things go, beggin' your pardon."

"Excellent—if you should marry again—take my advice—don't have a supper. I've been having one for the past two days. Oh, well—ask the bar steward to bring an egg and a bottle of Worcestershire sauce when he brings the brandy."

"Yes, sir."

Archie Simms liked Mr. George. A lot of young men would just be nasty to a steward when they'd had a nip too much the night before. Shoutin' nasty. He sent the barber up and the bar steward down, and set about running Mr. George's bath. At six thirty he went down for his supper.

THERE were some sheets of the *Daily Express* in the pantry. Archie thumbed them over and turned to the Castlerosse page. He liked the ring of Castlerosse's writing—and the things he said about people. The racing at Doncaster—fine feathers, fine ladies, fine horses—racing should not be a drip-nose sport. And again: "I met Mr. Arthur Bellinger this morning, who tells me that a very ancient and honorable custom of his youth has come back into being. It seems that one not only takes the health of the bride in broken glass—

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but one may even take it in broken chairs from sheer enthusiasm. The Berkeley lost forty chairs not later that last evening. The charming custom, it appears, was revived by the Honorable John Baltho Townshend in honor of Mr. Barry George, the American, who sails to-morrow to quarter his railroads and copper mines with the grace and most exquisite beauty of Pamela Stewart. And speaking of beautiful women—"

Said Archie Simms to Archie Simms, "I certainly 'opes 'e's 'appy wiv 'er—'e's a fine young man."

The chimes were going for dinner when Archie Simms polished off the last of his sweet and made his way back to his bed-turning and ice water rounds.

Cabins Nine and Ten needed a thorough going over. "Careless people, them Inglises—clothes all over the plyce. Spreads dirty from shoes—cigarette ashes and burnt pyper in the barth room—" He went out for his pan and brush and started in on the mess. Thoroughgoing, Archie Simms. The burnt paper had got down between the damp wooden gratings. He lifted them and swept underneath. Flimsy pink paper it was. He picked up a half burned fragment.

"Bar chits, stryke me—couldn't he tear 'em up and put 'em in the basket? 'Ullo, 'ullo, 'ullo—" Archie Simms stood up and held the chit fragment to the light. Under "—mall Schwe—" part of a signature was scrawled: "Barry Geo—"

"Stryke me—'is chits they are. Funny. Wot would 'is chits be doin' over 'ere?—Burnt up, too." Archie Simms shook his head and went on with his sweeping. "Funny." He wadded the towels into a pile and put them outside in the passage while he went back for the wastebasket. He emptied it into his dust pan and turned down the bed, then he took the towels and the pan down to his slop locker. Gingerly he shook out the bath towels to separate them from the face towels.

"'Ullo! 'Ole in it." He tossed that one aside. "'Ole in this one too—burnt 'ole in every blinkin' one—syme size too." He stuck the tip of his little finger into the holes. It just fitted. He picked up the last face towel. It was charred black around the hole for a space he could barely cover with the palm of his hand.

"Stryke me—burnin' towels—like a red hot poker would do it. What're they up to, I wonder? Funny, very funny."

He closed the door of his locker and sat down on the bin with his dust pan on his knees. Carefully and from sheer curiosity he started to play another game that he was rather fond of in a small way. He sorted out the torn and wadded pieces of paper from Number Ten's basket. A gelatine candy box wrapping he threw aside and with it a broken cork, string, two hairpins and a match stick. But what he didn't throw away was a corner of gray paper that had a column of letters on it.

ry Geo
ry Geo
ry Geo
ry Geo

"Oh ho," said Archie Simms. "So it's that, is it? Plyin' steward to get the young 'un's nyme 'e was, was 'e? Then he'll be writin' fairy tyles wiv it next, I suppose." He picked up another fragment that had "—eleven o'—" on it and a third that read "—to—ni—"

"'Ullo an' strike me. What would that be now? I should think it'd be the check book next, he'd be after—"

The buzzer clacked overhead and the

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indicator stood on Nine. The door of the cabin was open when he got there and Mr. Inglis, dressed for dinner, was lighting a cigarette.

"Oh, steward—find Mrs. Inglis for me, will you, and ask her to join me in the Smoke Room for a cocktail—as soon as she can."

"Yes, sir," Archie Simms went out into the Smoke Room passage, pushed open the door into Jack's sanctum and rang the rotunda.

"Mrs. Inglis," he said, "she's to come up to the Smoke Room for a nip wiv her husband—when you find 'er." He hung up and turned to Jack. "I don't mind if I do," he said. "Sherry'll do the trick."

JACK filled two glasses and Archie sat down and dug into a pile of magazines under the wine bin.

"'Ope we ayn't got no one goin' off in Cherbourg," he said. "Them frog custom men'll be off juty by the time we get tied up. That means all night alongside."

Jack shook his head. "Forty-two comin' aboard altogether with eighteen of them cabin. No one going off. Mr. Jenks told me himself."

Archie nodded and finished his sherry. "We'll be in by nine thirty." He took a copy of "Wadley's" and went back to Cabin Eleven for his evening smoke. From the doorway he snapped on the dressing room light, closed the door carefully and crossed the darkened cabin to the smaller room.

For perhaps three quarters of an hour he sat there reading, then he got up, snapped off the light and pulled back the curtains. The lights of Cherbourg twinkled far ahead in the darkness and almost at once the bridge rang down half and the liner lost speed. Archie Simms fanned out his smoke as before and went back through the cabin to the passageway. As he closed and locked the outer door he thought: "'Ope no bloke tykes 'er from Cherbourg—chummy like—'aving an empty to pop into for a fag now and then." He pocketed the key and stuck a finger into his collar to pull it down. The movement raised his chin and his mouth popped open.

"Stryke me," he said. "Must be goin' off m' conk!" He stared at the number over the door—a small black number on a glazed porcelain disk that was held to the woodwork by two small brass screws. It was Number Nine.

"Did I come in the Smoke Room passage or did I come in the starboard gangway? I certainly come in the Smoke Room passage, I did—and the first cabin on the left ought to be number eleven—the empty one. I sye—wot's all this, anywye?" But the number on the door to the left stared blankly at him. It was Nine. He scratched his head in perplexity and looked at the number of the cabin opposite. It was Twelve. It should have been Ten. "Am I barmy?" He drew a long breath. "Archie Simms—answer me that.

"We'll see." He unlocked the cabin which now bore the number Twelve, snapped the lights on and looked at the luggage racks. That was right—and yet the number was wrong. He scratched his head. The racks complacently held bags—women's bags marked "E. S. I."

"Well—stryke me—a spot of sherry never did that before!"

Again he locked the door and went slowly out on the starboard deck.

The liner was creeping in with the long curving shadow of the Mole, picked out in winking lights, arching toward it to starboard. Archie Simms watched it doubtfully. He was still

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worried and presently he went down the deck ladder and made his way forward. He leaned his head in at the office.

"Anyone from 'ere for Eleven, 'B' Deck, Mister 'Arper?"

"Not yet, Simms."

"Thank you, sir." He moved over to the deck diagrams on the bulkhead and looked at "B" Deck. Slowly he ran his finger over the by-pass passage on which the confusing cabins were located.

"Now what do you myke of that, I arsk you? The diagram's not a mite of help!"

THE hook went down presently and the ship lay waiting for the tender. From the rail Archie Simms thoughtfully watched it come in alongside, then with the other stewards he went down and stood in the luggage queue to pass the stuff aboard. But his mind was not on his work. Deep forebodings seethed and boiled in his usually calm brain. The passengers filed up behind him, laughing and chattering like magpies and presently the hand luggage was coming up in a steady stream and thumping on deck in two long rows.

With the last of it, the tender cast off and made its way back across the dark waters. The gangway came up to its lashings. Forward the donkeys snorted and strained at the hook.

By the time the luggage was sorted and the bedroom men had it racked, the rotunda clock stood at ten. Archie Simms went slowly up to "B" Deck. The Smoke Room crowd was thinning out and there were only half a dozen occupied chairs on the deck itself.

He went into the by-pass passage. There was no one in any of the three booked cabins. With a grim look on his face he threw the bolts shut on both end doors and for something like a quarter of an hour he busied himself in the cabins off the locked passageway. When he was finished, he unbolted the doors, mopped his brow and let himself into Cabin Eleven, which still bore the disturbing number Nine glistening on its door, to wait.

Ten minutes went by, then he heard the Smoke Room passage door open and close and some one stopped in front of the door opposite. He heard the door close quietly. Archie Simms smiled wisely to himself.

It was an hour later when he heard the starboard gangway door open and he heard Mr. Barry George say, "Well, good night, old man," and the rattle of the key down the corridor.

Some one laughed and Mr. Inglis's voice said, "Over there, isn't it?—that's Cabin Twelve."

"So it is," said Mr. George. "I thought we came in the other passage."

Then, in quick succession, two cabin doors closed and the by-pass was quiet. Archie Simms sat quite still with an icy tingling in his finger tips. "There was something — something — if you could only just figger it all out—something."

It came with the suddenness of a knife in the ribs—a loud banging as of doubled fists beating frantically on the panels of a cabin door—the sharp bark of a revolver shot—a woman's scream and a man's voice frenzied with anger, shouting.

Archie Simms was in the passage just as the doors at both ends were pulled open by people from the deck and from the Smoke Room, crowding and shoving each other with Croker trying his best to hold them back.

Across the hall the door of Cabin Ten stood wide open. Mr. Barry

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George in a dressing gown was flat on his back on the deck and Mr. Inglis kneeling on his chest—a revolver between them and the locker. Mrs. Inglis in pyjamas and kimono, hands to throat, leaned wide eyed against the foot of the bed.

"Get the purser—you man!" yelled Mr. Inglis. "I'll fix this sneaking swine!"

"Are you hurt, Mr. George, sir?"

"No—damn it. I say—off the chest a bit—what's the game, anyway?"

Archie Simms caught Croker by the sleeve. "Get Mr. Franklin, Alf—quick!"—and he slammed the door of the cabin and locked it on the inside.

"Open that door," shouted Mr. Inglis. "I don't care who knows about this business. The more the merrier."

"Oh, shut off the melodrama," said Barry George. He tore a fist loose and jammed it against Inglis's elbow and with a quick twist got to his knees and stood up.

"It's a pretty enough game as it is without going any further with it. You've apparently gotten what you wanted to get." His fingers were trembling as he reached for his cigarette case. "—and just at the right moment, too, I should say—"

There was a knock at the door.

"Mr. Franklin?" asked Archie Simms.

"Yes."

HE opened the door and let the purser in. The passage outside was packed and jammed with milling passengers. He closed the door on them once more and stood to one side, waiting.

"What's the trouble?"

"Trouble?" snapped Mr. Inglis. "I'll damn well tell you what the trouble is! This is my wife's cabin—Cabin Ten. She was in the Palm Garden the last I saw of her, playing bridge. I had a nightcap twenty minutes ago with this man George and left him going into his own cabin—Cabin Twelve. I was getting ready for bed in my cabin—the connecting door was locked on my wife's side. I heard a noise in here. I called to her, but as there was no answer, I came around through the passage and opened the door. They were in here together—you hear that? And as I came in, George fired a shot at me—there's his gun there—so I tackled him and threw him."

Mrs. Inglis burst into tears and sank down upon the bed.

"Oh, it's not true—it's not!" she sobbed.

Mr. George had managed to light his cigarette. He sat down on the locker top. "That's so," he said, "but I haven't the foggiest notion how we'll arrange to prove it. First of all, believe it or not, Inglis saw me coming into this cabin. In fact, he pointed out that it was my cabin — Twelve — and watched me go in. I could have sworn it was Twelve. I haven't been out since. I took off my jacket and waistcoat and started into the bathroom, but the door was locked.

"Just then Inglis burst in with a gun in his hand, fired a shot into the ceiling there and threw his gun out of the port—then the bathroom door flew open and there was Mrs. Inglis just as she is now. Inglis got me off my guard and tackled me, and here," said Mr. George ruefully, "we all are."

"Whose gun is that?" asked Inglis, pointing to the floor.

"Oh, it's mine all right," said Barry George. "The steward will tell you I missed it this afternoon, but that's no proof—I could have hidden it and made up the story."

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"You see!" said Mr. Inglis.

The purser picked up the gun, broke it and caught the five shells in the palm of his hand. One of the brass casings was empty.

Mrs. Inglis was crumpling a piece of gray paper in her hand and moving toward the open port. Inglis caught at her savagely and wrenched her hand open. "Look!" He smoothed the paper and handed it to the purser—"'To-night at eleven, Barry.' If that's not enough I'd like to know what is."

"Did you write this, Mr. George?"

Barry George looked at it.

"Of course not, idiot! I don't know these people from Adam—but it's near enough to my handwriting — I say — just have a look at the door and see what cabin this is anyway, will you? Am I going crazy or what?"

"It's Cabin Ten, all right, Mr. George. The man who came down for me told me Ten and I looked at the number, of course, before I knocked."

"Well—I'll be damned—I guess that tears it. But how it happened is more than I know."

"But you'll know something before I get finished with you," shouted Inglis. "I shall radio my lawyers to-night to draw up the necessary papers and to institute suit immediately we dock in New York—naming you as corespondent—with an added police charge of felonious assault."

"Now, g e n t l e m e n—gentlemen, please! There must be some mistake here. The cabins are adjoining and even if the door is locked between, I can't believe—"

"What you see—what is proven before your eyes, I suppose?" said Inglis. "Well, whether you believe it or not you'd better remember it, for there'll be a subpœna waiting for you when we tie up."

"Very good, sir," said the purser stiffly. "In that case I don't see what more we can do about it to-night, do you? I shall take the gun—"

"Don't you touch it—it's got his finger-prints on it—that's evidence. If you do—take it in a handkerchief."

"As you say." The purser took out his handkerchief. "And in the interests of the ship and the line might I ask that the incident goes no further at present—that is until we dock?"

"To hell with the ship!"

MR. GEORGE smiled. "Well, Inglis, old boy, get it off your chest. How much have you and your charming wife figured that this will cost me?"

"Are you trying to insinuate that I'd touch your money?"

"Not at all—but alienation of affection has a market value as everything else has in this day and age. And as it happens, I hate lawyers and publicity as I hate snakes in the grass. Let me see," he took a check book from the dresser top and uncapped a fountain pen.

"Mr. George," said the purser, "if you'll listen to me—I wouldn't do that."

"I won't listen," said Barry, "so don't say anything. This kills your bird as well as mine and keeps the ship out of it." He looked at Inglis. "I'll make it generous—and when you look at it you will either fold it up and put it in your pocket or tear it up. If you fold it up, you will sit down and write a little note to my dictation which we will both see put in the purser's safe—not to be withdrawn in New York until you have had time to get to my bank—but a little note that kept in my possession will keep you from coming back for more candy—"

"Mister George, sir—please don't

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write anything for a minit." The four people looked at Archie Simms. He stood there uncertainly with his fingers tight against the sides of his trousers, very white in the face.

"A—a steward can't help but see some things, 'e can't, beggin' your pardons. It ayn't necessarily snoopin', it ayn't. They just 'appens natural like. I seen some things to-dye." He turned apologetically to the purser. "Could I just tell 'em 'ow they 'appened, Mister Franklin, not meanin' to myke no trouble like?"

"Tell what?" asked the purser.

"Well, sir—first about the gun. Whether it was missin' or not—some one wrapped a gun up in towels this afternoon—muffled it like and fired it. Them towels is in m' slop locker now. They come from Cabin Nine—Mr. Inglis's cabin. Then there was these that come from Cabin Nine, too." Archie Simms pulled out a piece of paper, unfolded it and laid a fragment of a bar chit and two pieces of gray paper on the locker-top. "They mayn't prove nothing either, sir—but there they are to show some one was practicin' Mr. George's handwritin' like—

"Then about nine o'clock it 'd be, sir, I dodged into Cabin Eleven's dressin' room," continued Archie Simms. "It's empty, sir, an' beggin' your pardon, I was tykin' a smoke or two which is agynst regulytions. I was sittin' there quiet like when I thought I heard a noise at the door—somethin' fumblin'. I went to the door as soon as I could get rid of my cigarette, but the passage was empty. But so help me, the number of the door said it was now Cabin Nine that I'd been sittin' in! That stymied me for 'arf a mo'.

"Then I realizes there was no nyme card on the door which there should 'a' been, for Eleven is the only cabin rightly vacant in this passage. That made me know the number wasn't right. But just the same I went down and had a look at the deck diagram. But as you know, Mr. Franklin, they chynged the de looxe cabins from letters to numbers when we was done over in June an' the diagram ayn't been chynged as yet."

"Well, anyhow, this isn't Mr. George's own cabin—it's Number Ten," snarled Inglis, glaring at him.

"Yes, sir," Archie Simms nodded calmly. "But what I was goin' to sye was this. Some one chynged the numbers! Some one took out the screws, cut 'em off short wiv clippers an' neatly cemented the screw heads back into the number plates. There was some one got in here also an' hung up Mr. George's dressing gown over Mrs. Inglis's clothes an' a few of his things from his own cabin to myke it seem to Mr. George when he first comes in that he was in his own cabin. 'Cause when Mr. George came in here the number on the door *was* Twelve—the number of his cabin! Then quick—like some one . . ." Archie shot a covert glance at Mr. Inglis who seemed suddenly to have become pale, "some one shifts all the number plates back to their rightful position—after Mr. George was in here!"

Mr. Franklin strode to the door, jerked it open and reached for the porcelain embossed number plate.

"No, sir!" almost shouted Archie Simms. "Don't touch it, sir! Fingerprints!"

Franklin wheeled and withdrew his hand. "I get you, steward," he said.

INGLIS'S hand was shaking as he lit a match—after two tries—and took a deep drag of a cigarette.

Archie Simms nodded. "I was figurin' sorta on that, Mr. Franklin.

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An' there wouldn't be any reason for one man's finger-prints to be on all four number plates in this passageway —leastways if there weren't somethin' rotten up? On all four of 'em, Mr. Franklin, sir?"

Mr. Franklin shook his head. "I don't think there would be, Simms."

"Well," said Archie Simms decisively, "blyme if I won't bet my whole year's wages—tips an' all—agynst the fact that Mr. Inglis's finger-prints—beggin' his pardon—is on each an' every one of the four porcelain plates on the doors. An' they ought to show up, sir, nice an' plain, for I carefully wiped off each one so that the prints would show plain-like, after I had examined 'em."

Inglis stammered something unintelligible.

"How about it, Mr. Inglis?" said Franklin slowly. "Shall we have the door number plates checked up by a finger-print expert when we get to New York, or would you and your wife care to let the matter against Mr. George drop?"

Inglis shot his wife a look. "We'll let the matter drop," he muttered hoarsely.

Franklin looked at his watch and faced Mr. Inglis. "If you hurry, you and your wife can make the pilot boat back to Cherbourg. If you care to, you may take up the matter of a refund with our offices there. I advise you strongly to hurry, for if you are aboard when we dock in New York I shall have no other course than to report the matter to the police."

Barry George scratched his head and went out into the passage. "Good Lord," he said. "What a squeak!"

And later, after the purser had gone to escort the Inglises overside—

"Archie Simms, my friend, I don't wish to fly in the face of what is right and decent, but my memory is very poor and if I should go ashore in a hurry I might forget the usual. So in case I do," he pulled six twenty-pound notes from his pocketbook, "I should not like to have it on my conscience."

"But—Mister George—a hundred an' twenty quid, sir?"

"Never talk about money, Archie Simms—it's low."

"Yes, sir—quite so, sir, an' I 'opes as 'ow you an' she is very 'appy, sir, beggin' your pardon."

"Thank you, Archie Simms we shall be."

Archie Simms went below decks to make his way forward to the glory hole. Brophy, the Second Class barber, was sitting on a hatch cover smoking the end of his good-night pipe.

"Bloomin' passengers," he said. "Two of 'em just off in the pilot boat —chynged their minds! That's all deep sea flunkying is nowadays—whims of passengers—with nothing ever happening but seasick dames and poor tips. Not for me. When you pull out of Cherbourg next passage I'll be snug an' comfy ashore with the Missus an' a neat little shop on Donover Street."

"An' drinkin' of our 'ealths in a pint of draft, wot'o?" said Archie Simms contentedly. An increasing tremor ran through the great body of the liner as she left the pilot boat and nosed out into the open sea on her six-day run to New York. "Well, I'm stying wiv the ship, Al. In my blood, I guess."

"Ah, garn, ye're barmy!" snorted Brophy.

"Mybe I am," grinned Archie Simms, "but there's those that might argue the point wiv you."

THE END.

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The infuriated mob was closing in

The Band of Death

By FRED MacISAAC

Author of "The Affair at Camp Laurel," "The Unknown Island," etc.

Buck Jervis and his millionaire pal thought Buenos Aires would be a swell place for a vacation—until a revolution started popping

THIS STORY HAS JUST BEGUN—START IT NOW.

IT started one night in Buenos Aires when Buck "Bombshell" Jervis, with good aim but questionable judgment, hit the Argentine president on the nose with an apple. The blood that spurted from the presidential proboscis was paid for dearly, however, for soldiers fired into the crowd surrounding the palace, killing a score of demonstrating students.

Jervis, accompanied by his companion, Richard Van Hooven, escapes unhurt and they hasten back to their hotel. They had just arrived in the South American city that day and, seeking diversion, had joined the throng of student agitators. Jervis's bull's-eye on the outraged presidential nose was not an accident—he is a big league pitcher on vacation.

Jervis, who is telling the story, and Van Hooven met in a New York speakeasy. Jervis was holding out on the New York Yankees for more pay;

This story began in the Argosy for December 3.

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Richard Van Hooven, reckless young millionaire, was holding out on the Federal courts, who wanted him to testify against his bootlegger.

Van Hooven persuades Jervis to take the position as his secretary, and offers to pay him his regular high-figured salary. The secretarial job, however, seems to consist of traveling and fighting companion. Van Hooven playfully insists upon introducing Jervis as a Congressman.

Back in their Buenos Aires hotel, the two friends encounter the Duke of Rugborough, an obnoxious Englishman who had married Van Hooven's sister and is being paid to stay away from her. The duke borrows some money and departs, and on his footsteps enters General Ibañez y Resolva, revolutionary leader, who reveals that he saw Buck hurl the apple, and will turn him over to the police unless both Americans join his party.

When Van Hooven sees Rita Calavero, red-headed leader of the Band of Death, the women's branch of the revolutionary forces, he decides he will join anything with which she is associated. Jervis is affected the same way by Fiora MacShane, part-Irish girl who is a member of the band. After swearing allegiance to the revolution, Buck and Dick return once more to their hotel, this time to be alarmed when Col. Ramon Espada appeared.

CHAPTER VI.

DICK GETS A JOLT.

"COME right in, *coronel*," Dick said. "Make yourself at home. Bring in the army if you like."

The colonel came into the room while the soldiers stood in the doorway.

"Do you speak Spanish, sir?" he asked very slowly. Dick nodded. Immediately the colonel twisted his little black mustache, showed us a lot of white teeth, bowed, stuck his hand into his breast pocket and pulled out an envelope. I figured it was a warrant for our arrest for what had happened the night before.

He began a long speech in Spanish. Dick listened and I saw him getting back his nerve. When the colonel finished, Dick shook hands with him and accepted the envelope and handed it to me.

"What do I do with this?" I asked anxiously.

"Open it, and pretend to read it." He then made a speech to the colonel in Spanish and the officer bore down on me and shook me by the hand. After that the colonel said something to the soldiers, who pulled up their guns and I thought they were going to shoot but they only presented them in a salute.

That was a relief, so I opened the letter, which was in Spanish. I handed it to Dick.

"Read this Choctaw," I said. "Are we pinched or are we not?"

Dick said something more to the colonel who bowed and backed out of the room and went off with his soldiers.

"This," said Dick, "is an invitation from President Ilioti to Congressman Buckram Jervis to present himself at the palace the day after to-morrow. A little courtesy from one high government official to another, old top."

"Oh my aunt!" I exclaimed. "See what you got me into? I'm a fake. If they don't shoot me for chucking the apple they'll jail me for pretending to be a Congressman. Let's get right out of this damn town."

Dick laughed loudly. "The papers must have given you a good write-up,"

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he declared. "I certainly gave them plenty of material. I suppose the American consul-general will be around to pay his respects. We'd better get out of the hotel. I doubt if you could fool him."

"But I can't meet this president after smashing his nose. You got me into this, you lunatic, and, if you don't get me out, I'm going to murder you. You have it coming to you anyway."

"Leave everything to me, old pal."

"That's how we got into so much trouble," I answered him.

"It will be fun, at that," said the nut. "It will be a formal reception. You wear a frock coat and plug hat. Just to see Buck Jervis in a plug hat is worth anything it costs."

"I'm not going."

"You are, if we are still in Buenos Aires—but we'd better make our getaway. Come to think of it, the Congressman business was sort of dumb. I pulled it on the duke and the general on impulse, but I shouldn't have talked to the reporters. Sometimes, Buck, I am a little indiscreet."

"When ain't you?"

"Oh, well, we'll carry it off. Let's dress and go down and look at the morning papers." He glanced at his watch. "Good Lord, twelve o'clock. In half an hour I'm going to be lunching with her."

"You just ate breakfast."

"I'll eat her up just the same. Oh, too-la-roo—la-ladday."

He began to dance around the room. I was still sore and frightened about the Congressman business and I didn't enjoy his performance. We were dressed in about fifteen minutes and ready to go, but, as we opened the door, we almost bumped into a bellboy with a note on a silver plate.

"For Señor Van Hooven," he said.

Dick opened it and glanced at it and looked as though somebody had poisoned him.

"She can't meet me," he said, almost ready to cry. "This is a hell of a note."

"She was the bait," I said cheerfully. "A nice bit of red-headed bait and now she's on the hook for some other poor fish."

"'Most important matters call me to Rosario,'" he read. "'A thousand regrets. You will hear from me soon.'

"I want a drink," he said savagely. "Come on, and if you utter one word, I'll strangle you."

AS the chief object in life of red-headed dames is to double cross people, I wasn't a bit surprised that she had run out on Dick. The revolutionists had his John Hancock to a document which would get him shot, and me with him, if the government got hold of it, and there was no more reason for Rita to bother with him. But it had looked to me, by the way she had let him kiss her, that she had tumbled for him as he had for her. Most likely she had had to go home to her husband; no matter what they claim, they always have husbands.

We went into the bar and there, clinging to the ropes, was the Duke of Rugborough. When he saw free drinks coming in on four feet, his grace let go his hold of the edge of the bar and toddled over to us.

"What ho!" he said. "Greetings and salutations!"

"Hello, Bugs," replied Dick. "Listen, did you ever hear of Señorita Rita Calavero?"

"Why, certainly," replied the duke.

Dick grabbed his arm eagerly.

"Come and sit down, old man. Who is she?"

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"A champagne cocktail wouldn't be so bad," insinuated the duke.

"Three of them," Dick told the waiter. "Hurry up and answer my question."

"The lovely Rita," exclaimed the duke. "Here's to every one of her titian hairs."

"Who is she?"

"Daughter of Sancho Calavero of Mendoza. He is the greatest wine grower in the Argentine. That girl is worth more money than one of your Vanderbilts."

"But she isn't married?"

"Not as far as I know. She's a hellion."

"Duke," I said, "let me shake your hand."

"With pleasure, Congressman."

"About that Congressman business—" I began.

"Third strike. Get away from the plate," said Dick quickly. "Bugs, I've a mind to break your head. She's not a hellion. She's the loveliest, sweetest—"

"Tut, tut," protested the duke. "I mean by Spanish standards. She is emancipated. She won't play the game. She goes where she likes, does what she pleases and dispenses with all the conventions. No *duennas* for her. She has a racing stable at Palermo; she's been arrested for reckless auto driving a dozen times. She has been ostracized by society because she goes into the stadium and plays pelota with professionals like the MacShane woman."

"You say anything about Fiora MacShane, duke," I warned him, "and I'll dent your head so your crown won't fit you."

The duke made the choking sound he called laughing. "One night in B. A. and you know both the Calavero and the MacShane!" he exclaimed. "So you stepped out last night, eh, what, my boy?"

"I met Señorita Calavero right here in the hotel," said Dick. "She lives here."

"Don't be stupid, old boy. She lives in a house as big as this hotel in the Calle Don Carlos. That girl is a hot one. I suggest that you give her the whole road if you see her coming."

"She sounds to me like a very glorious young lady," answered Dick. "I'll tell you something, Rugborough. I'm going to marry that girl."

"Ho, ho," chuckled the duke. "Don't let General Torres y Villa hear you make any such a boast."

"Who is he?"

"Minister of War and a tartar. He is affianced to her. An arrangement made when she was a child. She has refused to marry him and he has left word at all the clubs that any man who makes up to her will have to answer to him."

Dick's face got red and he stuck out his chin. "I'll make it my business to call on the scoundrel this afternoon and repeat my statement," he said savagely.

I grabbed his arm. "Back up," I ordered. "We're in trouble enough."

"The Congressman is right," said the duke earnestly. "Dick, old man, this isn't Anglo-Saxon country. You can't fight Villa with fists. He'll have you assassinated. Besides, the girl wouldn't look at you."

"No? I've held her in my arms. What do you think of that?"

RUGBOROUGH'S fishy eyes lighted with curiosity. "I think you're a bally liar, if you want to know. Rita has no use for men. She told a reporter that we were all rotters and she wouldn't marry the best man who ever lived. Made a sensation. They

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tried to get her father to put her in a convent, but the old boy is under her thumb."

"Forget that," I said to Dick. "Duke, do these revolutionists amount to anything?"

"Certainly not. There is some disaffection, but the government is strong. Every paper in the city praised the administration for firing upon the rioters last night and demanded the apprehension of the scoundrel who threw an orange—"

"Apple—" I said and Dick stamped on my foot.

"Well, some sort of fruit, and disfigured his excellency. This is the most civilized country in South America, after all."

"Where can I find this General Torres y Villa?" demanded Dick anxiously.

"Congressman," said Rugborough, "use your authority. The man is mad. Of course he always was. His whole family is mad, as I have reason to know."

"Leave him to me," I said grimly. It was right then and there I decided that I'd take charge of our business in the future. In one day the nut had fixed it so we could be executed for about five different crimes.

"Do you know Rita?" Dick asked, paying no attention to me.

"I know everybody," replied Rugborough. "Never fancied red-headed women."

"You and me, duke," I told him joyfully.

"By the way, Congressman," remarked the Englishman, "that was pretty stiff, your statement to *La Prensa.*"

"Let's not go into that. Who cares?" demanded Dick.

"I mean that prohibition would make the Argentine more prosperous and that all the bars in Buenos Aires ought to be closed. How could we stand the bally country if we couldn't get liquor?"

"What did you tell 'em that for?" I asked Dick reproachfully.

"My boy," he replied, "if you want to get space in newspapers, say something nasty. You probably wouldn't have been invited to meet the president if your interview had been banal."

"Did I want to meet the president?" I demanded, much aggrieved. "Did I want a lot of bum publicity? Do I ask for—"

"In order to prove beyond the shadow of a doubt that Buck is a bone-dry Congressman, he will now have another drink," stated Van Hooven. "Bugs, did anybody ask you about our movements last night?"

"No," replied the duke. "I ran into a Johnny from your consulate and happened to mention that Congressman Jervis of Oklahoma was in town, but he said I meant Iowa; put up quite an argument and dug a little book out of his pocket to prove it. I laid him a ten *peso* note he was wrong, book to the contrary notwithstanding. My reputation may be shady, but my ears are good."

"Whoops!" bellowed Dick and slammed me between the shoulder blades. "You lose, Bugsy. Iowa is the sterling State represented by the old boy here. Oklahoma is out. Jervis hails from Eclair, Iowa, just as the consul's little book asserts."

"Eclair?" inquired the duke. "Chocolate or vanilla?"

"Something full of nuts," Dick told him. "What a break, eh, Buck?"

"I don't see any break," I answered.

"No matter. You may call upon the president with a clean conscience.

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You have been authenticated, as it were. Bugs, are you a good guide to Buenos Aires? Want to show us the town?"

"Never been in any public buildings," replied the duke. "Know the principal streets and the way to the Jockey Club, and who makes the best cocktails."

Dick laughed. "That's all a man needs to know in any city. *Muchacho*, how *mucho?* Lead on, your disgrace!"

ABOUT two o'clock we reached the race track, after lunching at some big café, and you might have thought you was at Belmont on a big day except that the people were all foreigners dressed up.

While the duke was confabbing with some friends, Dick told me that the book the consulate man had pulled on Rugborough was an official list of members of the Senate and House of Representatives and if I hadn't been a lucky stiff like all left handers, I would have been unmasked as a fake.

"There seems to be a Congressman Jervis from Iowa who has a "B" among his initials," he said, "so I just moved you out of the oil regions into the corn belt. Leave everything to Poppa, Buckie, my boy. I never make a mistake."

I must say that the race track at Palermo was a hum-dinger and you didn't have to look for a guy under a certain tree wearing a pink hat and a red necktie in order to lay a bet. Down there they think a man is entitled to lose his money any way he wants to. The Argentine dames were on parade and they were nothing to complain about. Mostly brunettes, they were, but enough blondes to give a contrast and all of them painted and powdered like a lot of chorus girls.

We looked the horses over and laid a bet on the first race and then we went up the club house steps and who do we meet coming down but the red-headed Rita Calavero. She had on a black skull-cap that made her red hair shine like fire, and a black, close-fitting satin dress with a cape and long black gloves and she was with a big dark man with sideburns and a nasty face.

Dick stood stock still, grabbed my arm and squeezed it hard. "Rita," he muttered. "She lied to me. She's here."

He turned white as a sheet, the boy did. He took it hard.

"Snap out of it," I told him. "Go over and take her away from that guy. I'll referee." They were just about to pass us.

"Rita!" he said like a dying duck.

Rita turned her head, looked him over from head to foot, gave him a stony glare and passed by.

Bugsy was a few feet behind us. He lifted his hat. She bowed to him, smiled and went off with her unpleasant looking friend.

"Which proves it wasn't two other girls," I remarked. "She didn't give the duke the Electrolux."

DICK sat down on one of the iron chairs strewn all over the inclosure. Not having seen enough of Fiora yet to know how bad love can hit you, I thought he was suffering from stomachache.

"Snap out of it," I advised him again. "Listen, the race has started."

The duke was up on a chair with a big pair of binoculars pointed across the track. He was ignoring us.

"Buck," said Dick. "Let's sneak out of here. I can't tolerate another minute of Rugborough. Let's go somewhere and think."

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"There ain't any such place," I told him.

Even that didn't make him laugh. He started to walk rapidly toward the exit and I trailed him, kind of worried. This love business is a terrible thing. I've seen guys go nuts over dames. There was an outfielder with the Yankees a few years back who was wild about a blonde in a musical comedy. He spent all his dough on her; she gave him the runaround, handed him a pack of lies, went out with five or six other guys; and he didn't believe anything we told him about her. Then, one night, he caught her cold and he went up to his room and tried to brain himself with a baseball bat. A club is about the worst weapon a man can use to end it all and he wasn't able to hit himself hard enough to crack his skull but he made a dent in it.

Now the funny thing was that this dent must have squashed out the part of the brain where the love business is located for, when he came to next day, he couldn't even remember her name. He was all right every other way; played a better game in the outfield than he had done before, but he didn't take any more interest in any kind of girl.

As I was trotting along after Dick I kept looking at the back of his noggin and it occurred to me that it was too bad I never took the trouble to find out just what part of this outfielder's knob had been dented, because it would be swell if I could slam this old boy in the right place and get that red-headed doublecrosser out of his mind. At that time, I want to say, I hadn't found out that love was something special because I'm very level headed and I hadn't flopped right over for Fiora then. I figured her as a swell dish, but I hadn't seen her toss the sphere in that basket.

Anyway, Dick was safe because there weren't any baseball bats nearer than seven thousand miles.

He hopped into a taxi and I fell in after him. He told the driver to streak it for the Plaza de Mayo.

"Dick," I said, "take it from one who knows. None of them is worth a minute of a good man's time."

He glared at me. "If you know what's good for you, Witless," he said, "you'll keep that gash you have for a mouth tightly closed." Well, I could have licked him but the guy wasn't in his right mind.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BATTLE OF BOCA.

AFTER about ten minutes he reached over and patted my arm.

"Buck," he said, "you're a prime young lad. I like you. I've treated you damn badly. I've considered myself a superior mind and I've been patronizing you and pulling your leg. You didn't know it, mostly, but the offenses were just as great. Will you accept my apology?"

"Oh, sure," I said, very uncomfortable. "You didn't put nothing over on me. I was on to you all the time."

He grinned. "Sure you were. Anyway, you're a mental colossus compared to me. I've been the prize damn fool of history. Thanks to my folly, I've dragged you into a very dangerous situation. I don't give a damn for myself, but I've got to get you out of it."

"Lissen, pal," I said from the heart, "I can get us both out of it if you'll leave it to me. All I ask of you is not to have any more bright ideas."

He grinned at that. "I know the ropes better than you," he replied,

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" and I'll have to lead, but in the future you're going to furnish the brain power for this combination."

" O. K.," I told him. " Glad you see things right. Just because a guy pitches with his left hand don't mean that he's screwy. I leave it to anybody if I ain't got more sense than any pitcher in the big leagues. What are you laughing at?"

" So I won't break down and cry," he said. " You were right about Rita. She's a sensation hound, a heartless flirt and a liar. She joined up with the revolutionists for thrills. She plotted to trap us just for the fun of doing it and after she had lured us into their toils she was through with me. Yet I swear she kissed me back last night."

" She did," I told him. " She fell for you, all right, but she got over it. Red-headed dames are fickle. I always heard that."

" First she lied to me to get out of our luncheon date," he continued. " Then, when we met her at the track, she cut me dead. No woman can treat me like that. I'm all washed up. I'm finished!"

" You got sense, boy."

" Therefore, there is no reason for us to remain in Buenos Aires. I don't want ever to set eyes on her any more. And I'm either going to be shaken down for a big sum by that crooked general or, if he's really out to overthrow the government, he'll involve us so that we'll land in a rotten prison or be stood against a wall with bandages over our eyes."

" I vote we vamose."

" Good. Now, they are undoubtedly keeping a watch on us at the hotel. They know we have gone to the races, and we probably w e r e not followed there. They expect us to go back to the hotel. We won't. We'll go to the Boca and hide out there until dark, and then we'll slip aboard the night boat for Montevideo. From there we'll send for our luggage. If we don't like Uruguay we'll work up to Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. I'll write to relatives in New York and find out if there is any way to square that Federal judge and, in a few months, we can go home. Of course you can go any time."

" I stick to you, pal," I told him. " But I'm for the get-away. I don't want to get a flock of bullets in my gizzard."

" That doesn't worry me. I'd like to muss things up here, but it would be playing Rita's game. I'm leaving to show her that I may be vamped, but I don't stay vamped."

" Attaboy!"

HE gave new directions to the chauffeur, who swung the car around and started off in a different direction. First, though, he put up an argument which Dick silenced.

" He told me that there was no excitement at the Boca until about ten at night," Dick said. " I told him we were much obliged for the information and that he was to do as he was told."

We rode for quite a long time. At first we drove through fine streets with big houses that looked like Palm Beach or Los Angeles and then we entered a district of one-story mud shacks. The streets were full of very poor people and everything looked down at the heels. Finally we came to a bridge and the chauffeur stopped and demanded more money.

It seems the place where we were going was out of the city limits and the taxi fares didn't go any more. When he was satisfied, he took us across the bridge and landed us in a

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dump that looked like Coney Island in the good old days before my time; a very mixed mess of dirty honkytonks, eating joints, and queer little houses with painted dames looking out of the windows or sitting in their doorways with no more on than a lot of burlesque queens.

You take Tia Juana and Reno and East Fourteenth Street, New York, and Havana and jumble them up, and you have some notion what Boca was like. The streets began to fill up with sailors as we rode on to a restaurant that the driver told Dick was the best to be found there. I saw gobs from a Yankee warship, English marines, Italian and French and German seamen in the mob, and though it was only four in the afternoon, most of them were stewed already.

"Looks like a cross section of hell," Dick said. "I'm there anyway, so what of it?"

"I can imagine this joint all lit up at night," I told him. "Boy, how quick you could pick a fight here!"

Dick perked up. "That's an idea," he exclaimed.

I grabbed him by the shoulder.

"Start anything and you'll have your battle with me, bo," I told him. "And I've got three inches and twenty pounds on you."

The cab stopped before a big place called "Madama Rosita's Cabaret and Restaurante." We paid off the driver and we went in and ordered a bottle of wine. There must have been tables for a thousand people inside, but nobody was patronizing the joint. I picked up the menu and read the English on it.

"Madama Rosita has provided fifty ballet dancers to wait upon her patrons, who are of the most aristocratic character, and a lady's orchestra of twenty beautiful French girls to discourse sweet music while motion pictures of the most excruciatingly audacious will be displayed during the evening."

At the far end of the room was a motion picture screen. There was a waiter asleep in a corner and the waiter who took our order and us—nobody else. But in five minutes dames began to arrive. All around the restaurant were doors and they were coming through all the doors. One by one they began to parade by our table, rolling their eyes and shaking their hips.

"Don't give any of them a tumble," whispered Dick. "It would be fatal."

"Don't worry," I told him. "Thought this was a first class place."

"I suppose it is for the Boca."

These girls were every size and color and there wasn't a good looker in the lot.

Though it was broad daylight, they had on evening dresses that were always coming unfastened when they passed our table.

When the waiter came back with our wine, Dick said to him, "Tell the ladies we don't want company and we'll have to leave if they bother us."

The waiter clapped his hands and yipped something, whereupon all the dames went back into the places that they came from. In two minutes we were alone again.

"DID you ever hear of the white slave traffic?" asked Dick.

"Sure. The Mann Act."

"This is not exactly the same thing," he said. "There is an organized trade in women between Europe and Buenos Aires. The Argentine government has passed laws to stop it, but it goes on just the same. All these

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women are working for an organization which robs them of most of the money they earn. Most pitiable state of affairs on earth. These, of course, are the dregs of the business—the expensive establishments of Buenos Aires support an entirely different type of white slaves, or so I have read. We've got to hide out here for a couple of hours and it looks as though we would have a terrible time."

"I wish we were back in New York," I said with a sigh. "Dick, how can a guy that knows as much as you be such a nut?"

"Buck," he says to me, "about the worst thing that can happen to a fellow is to have a lot of money he didn't earn. When I was at prep school I had five thousand a year to spend. When I was in college I had three automobiles and money enough to buy wine for all the chorus girls who came to Boston. When I graduated, I came into an income of a hundred thousand dollars a year from a trust fund of two and a half million dollars.

"All the fellows in my class were excited about graduating and full of plans for getting along in the world, but I didn't have to work for a living. If I took a job I would have been taking bread out of somebody's mouth. What was the use of my having ambition? How much were you earning when you were twenty years old?"

"Three dollars a week, delivering baskets for a grocery store, and I would get ten dollars every two weeks for pitching for the town ball team."

"There you are. Nothing for me to do except amuse myself. Do you know that there are only a very few amusing things to do and you get sick of them in no time? I went to Europe for a year. I went hunting in Africa. I tried winter sports in Switzerland. I drifted from one resort to another and found one just like another. Drinking, dancing, flirting, gambling — ingenuity in entertainment.

"Girls? They were either rich and wild like myself or they were out to marry me for my money. I fell for one when I was twenty and got badly hurt. After that I suspected them all."

"I wish I had a hundred thousand dollars a year," I told him. "You wouldn't hear me beefing about it."

"You'd go haywire," he said, smiling. "All you really like to do is to pitch for a big league team. Well, your money would ruin you in no time and you'd be kicked out of baseball."

"I'd take a chance," I told him.

Dick shook his head. "When I started down here with you," he said, "I was ready to finish things. I had a notion of jumping off the ship. That day you stopped me from going over the rail, I was insane enough to commit suicide. Well, we landed in Buenos Aires. On the way to the hotel I realized that it was just another town like Paris and New York and Budapest; a place to drink and gamble and flirt and dance. I was very low when that demonstration started. What followed gave me an interest in life. Rita was a type of woman I had never met before. When she marched into that cellar at the head of the Band of Death, I could have worshipped her. I didn't care anything about their fool revolution, but if she had suggested it, I would have charged a machine gun battery unarmed and single handed. The two things in life I had missed were a woman a man could admire and a nice big war.

"It turns out that she is a liar and a cheat and the agent of a gang of blackmailers—not revolutionists. They intend to bleed me until it hurts. It will

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be some slight satisfaction to fool them."

WHILE he was talking I had been hearing a lot of shouting outside and it was growing louder. I got up and looked out the window.

Madama Rosita's was on a short, narrow street and into this street three sailors came running with a mob at their heels. They were English bluejackets off a cruiser in the harbor and if there is anything I hate it's bluenoses.

"What's up?" asked Dick, who hadn't left the table.

"Scrap," I told him. "Three bulldogs and a lot of hyenas."

The gang that were chasing the Britishers were black, tan and every other shade and some of them had queer uniforms on and some were just in dirty shirts and overalls. A brick came flying through the air as the Englishmen were opposite the restaurant and struck one of the sailors in the back. He pitched forward on his face and the others stopped to pull him to his feet.

With howls and yells another gang came around the corner at the opposite end of the street, and those below cheered because they had the limeys nicely trapped.

"Curtains for cockneys," I said to Dick. But he had his head out the window.

"In here, boys," he yelled. "Blood is thicker than water."

The bluenoses didn't have to have two invitations. They rushed their pal through the door and Dick took him off their hands and sat him in a chair.

"What's the trouble, lads?" he asked cheerfully.

"Bill 'ere, slugged a big coon," said one of the seamen. "'Is friends rallied round and we gave 'em wot for till they got too many for us and we took to our heels."

The mob piled up outside the café, yelling at the top of their lungs. Some of them stood in the doorway and dared the limeys to come out.

"Officers' restaurant, sir," said one of the sailors. "They don't dare come in here. We ain't go no right here eyther."

The two waiters were at our elbows jabbering at Dick.

"Certainly they stay," he declared. "Friends of mine. Bring them champagne."

One waiter proceeded to have a fit and pushed Dick.

"They go and you go with them," is what Dick claims the hop-head told him.

Slam! Dick swung on him and laid him flat. "Come on, boys, sit down at a table," he said cheerful as can be. "I'll pay the freight."

"I sye," said the cockney, "you're a bit of all right, you are."

The three hunks of roast beef sat down and this was too much for the gang outside, for they pushed right into the restaurant and made for our table. In a few seconds there were about twenty of the scum coming for us and some had sticks and I saw one bozo opening a sailor's knife with his teeth.

The two waiters took it on the lam, but Dick stood up and insulted the mob in Spanish—it must have been insults by the way they howled.

"Sorry, sir, we're in for it," said the Englishman who was doing the talking. "Come on, Jock," to the one that was hurt. "Put yer dukes up."

This limey, who wasn't more than eighteen years old, got on his pins and the five of us faced the flood that was coming down on us.

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I'm telling you I was sorer than a guy with sunburn. This was a street row that Dick Van Hooven had invited into the café and now we were going to get beaten up or murdered. Why, they might break my pitching arm! Thinking of this, I picked up a chair and slammed it right into the foremost that were only six feet away from us. Boy, it bowled them over, but those behind came on and there were a lot of knives out now.

Swish! Dick had a chair and he was brandishing it around his head. The limeys picked up chairs and laid around with them. I grabbed a table that must have weighed forty pounds and tossed it right into the mob. Half a dozen went down.

I'm a feller who has to earn his living by keeping his left arm in shape and it's my business to keep out of rough and tumbles. The way I felt, it would serve Van Hooven right if they fractured his skull and I didn't care what they did to the limeys that turned the Indians loose on American settlers away back in 1776. According to their own story, they had started this jamboree by slugging a nigger. But when a big mulatto hit me over the head with a short club I forgot about my arm and enjoyed the battle.

I hit that yellow boy and he fell over and then I swung my left and slammed a big Frenchman, who was about to brain Dick with a chair, so hard he had to knock two or three down to make room to fall. The five of us were close together and, when we ran out of chairs, we used our fists and our feet, but they were still coming in from the street and about four took the places of every man we put out of business.

We didn't say a word, but the enemy was howling and yipping and screaming and women's screams were louder than anything else. All the dolls had come out of their cages and were standing in their doorways cheering on the greasers.

THE little sailor was knocked down and a fellow tried to put the boots to him. I sideswiped him and picked the limey up. He was crying, he was so mad, and he was fighting like a wildcat. Somebody threw a knife and it slithered past my ear and stuck into a black boy who was behind me. We couldn't lick sixty of them and we were being driven back, of course, but every time we came to another table and a lot of chairs we chucked them at the murderers and delayed them some.

I got a look at Dick. His clothes were torn, he had one eye cut, but he had a broad smile on his face and it looked as though he was enjoying life. I was having kind of a good time myself.

Boy, oh, boy, what a sweet swatfest it was. A guy climbed right up my back and I tossed him over my head into the crowd. Being the only intelligent one there, I kept my head and I knew we could last longer if we had a wall behind us.

"Duck to the back of the room," I yelped, and dragged Dick away from six or eight who didn't know what to do about right and left hooks. "Come on, limeys!"

It was just in time because they were spreading out and there were half a dozen that had come up behind us. We made a quick rush, knocked the spigs in back out of the way and ran the length of the room. They thought we'd quit and they shouted ferociously and came running after us. We backed up against a long counter, faced them, and the battle was on again.

The joint was a wreck. Every table was overturned, half the chairs were

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smashed and it looked like a swell New York night club after the prohibition unit has broken things up. Behind the fighting men, about the whole population of Boca had crowded in to see our Waterloo and we didn't have a friend in a carload of them.

And there were still about twenty-five healthy men in front of us and half of them had knives out.

"Sorry, old chap," Dick said to me. "It looks like our finish. They'll cut us into hamburger."

Wham! They closed in. *Biff—bang—slam—crash!* Two of the limeys were down and the only one left was the kid, who was crying and clawing and kicking and biting. My elbow went back as I prepared to let loose a left hook and it touched something round. My man went down and I looked around. Coconuts. A big array of coconuts piled like a pyramid on top of the counter.

"Over," I said, and slid across the counter. Dick didn't hear me and neither did John Bull—they didn't know that fists had gone into the discard. I grabbed me the top coconut and went into action.

I'm the man that won the pitcher's competition for accuracy the last field day. I could hit a dot on a plank from a hundred feet nineteen times out of twenty. And many a rainy afternoon I've took a trip down to Coney just to show the colored race that they hadn't ought to stick their heads in a hole in a sheet of canvas and invite people to take a shot at them.

I don't want you to think that I'm a blowhard, which is why I don't take any credit for the massacre at Madama Rosita's. Some of them weren't five feet away.

Friends, they went over like ninepins when a good bowler sends the ball down the alley. My old left shot coconuts like a rapid fire gun spews bullets. If they hadn't been so close I guess I would have killed a lot of them, but I just aimed at their noses and mouths and was careful not to hit them on the temples.

In no time there was a pile of bodies in front of Dick and the limey and those that weren't down were scramming for the nearest exit. I let them have my swift ones when I saw their backs and you should have seen them hit the dirt when a two or three pound coconut was planted between their shoulder blades.

The stampede at the front entrance was worse than the Iroquois Theatre fire in Chicago and I guess more damage was done in the retreat than in the battle.

Now, during all this time, a fat girl with a voice like a steam whistle and a face that would stop a clock had been standing in front of her door over on the left suggesting that the spigs tear us limb from limb, so I fed her a coconut. Of course I didn't put all I had behind that one, but it knocked her flat and she crawled on hands and knees into her crib and slammed the door.

I had pitched about fifty coconuts and there was only a dozen or so left so I used those to hasten the exit of the rats that had been knocked down and got up again.

Dick had been battered so hard that he was in a daze and the limeys were practically unconscious before they came off their battle wagon. For a minute or two they just stood there and couldn't understand why the Argentines, the Eyetalians and the Greeks were trying so hard to get out of the joint. I reached under the counter, found a bottle of whisky and some glasses, slapped them on the bar and

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said, "Well, gents, what will you have to drink?"

CHAPTER VIII.

IN JAIL AND OUT.

DICK turned around. One of his eyes was bleeding, his nose was swelling and he had a cut lip but he was still grinning.

"Buck," he inquired, "would you give a fellow a nice sweet kiss?"

"I never did see the like!" said one cockney. "I sye, 'lad, are you a professional cricket bowler?"

This limey was a sight to behold but, nevertheless, I reached for the last coconut.

"Have a heart, Buck," pleaded Dick. "He thinks it's a compliment."

So Dick and me and the three bunged-up Britishers had a couple of drinks on the house and we paid no attention whatever to the waiters who came back with a fat, ugly, gray-haired old woman who stood there and called us names.

"And now what?" asked Dick. He turned to the limeys. "Boys," he said, "I have you to thank for a very pleasant afternoon."

One of the Englishmen gasped.

"I say, sir," he said. "You top any Yankee I ever met. You fought like an Englishman."

The second swab wagged his head. "It's hard to account for," he added.

"On the contrary," replied Dick. "You see, boys, I happen to be the brother-in-law of the Duke of Rugborough."

The three of them gazed upon him with awe.

"A duke!" one of them said.

"Blood will tell," observed another.

Thinking about the figure Rugborough would have cut in that mêlée, I poured myself another drink. I had flexed the old soupbone and it was absolutely O. K. and I never felt better in my life.

While all this was going on the Patagonian army had managed to clear out to the last man and we would have been very cozy if a lot of uniforms hadn't marched in.

No matter what country you're in you'll find that cop nature never changes.

The riot in Madama Rosita's was heard all the way to the station house and the reserves were called out and they had marched to the scene of the battle and waited outside until it was safe to go in.

Now they plunged into the place with drawn swords, pinched the five of us and listened sympathetically to Rosita's tale of woe. We couldn't break into the argument at all; they hustled us out of the restaurant and formed a hollow square around us and pricked us with the points of their carving knives all the way to the local calaboose.

A police captain in gold lace and epaulets welcomed us. It seemed they had a deal with King George of England by which his sailors who got into trouble should be sent back to their ships to be punished by their officers, so, without giving us a chance to say good-by to the limeys who were responsible for it all, they sent a squad with them down to the port. As for me and Dick, they didn't even ask our names but they jammed us into a cell together and locked an iron door, about six inches thick, on us.

There was a window high in the wall, about four inches by six, which didn't let in much light but it was enough for us to realize that we were

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so bunged up that we must have looked like bums to the Argentine "finest."

"Well," I said to the boy friend, "looks as though we're going to jail sooner than we expected. Do you know the combination that will get us out of this?"

Dick nodded. "About a thousand shin plasters and the Duke of Rugborough. Bugsy will be useful for the first time in his life."

"Will you answer me one thing? Did we have to butt into this fight?"

"They'd have murdered those three English boys, Buck," he said solemnly. "Don't you think there would be enough bluenoses left if they did?"

He slapped me on the back. "Wish I could wash up," he said. "Buck, you'd have gone out to help them if the fight had been in the street, if for no other reason than because they were the under-dogs."

"Oh, yeah? I got my pitching arm to think about."

HE laughed and then began to kick the door. In a minute a cop with a big mustache and a scowl opened it and stuck in his head. Dick wagged a fifty-*peso* note under his nose, and you should have seen that policeman change his expression.

In a couple of minutes he was back with hot water and towels and a request to be of further service. Dick told him to call up the duke at the address Bugsy had given us and ask him to step on the gas. After that we had a good wash and sat down on the bunk to wait for the relief expedition.

This hoosegow, by the way, was an old one-story adobe and the cell had not been cleaned since O'Higgins started his revolution a hundred years back. Generations of garlic eaters must have lived and died in it, judging by the odors, and the blanket on the cot had a perfume that was all its own.

We didn't say anything for quite a long while. Finally Dick began to chuckle.

"It's a wonder you didn't kill some of them," he said. "Those coconuts were heavy as cannon balls and traveled about as fast."

"I thought of that," I told him. "I planted 'em where I wanted."

"You earned a year's salary, old man." He looked at his wrist watch. Despite what had happened, it wasn't broken.

"Five thirty," he said. "I doubt if we make the night boat for Montevideo."

"Me, too. We ain't going anywhere. Maybe the general will let us out when he gets to be president."

"Don't be a pessimist. We're innocent."

The joint was getting on my nerves. I can stand anything but bad smells.

"Rugborough," I sneered. "He wouldn't cross the street to help anybody. And maybe they won't look in the right saloon for his grace."

"He's our only hope," Dick said glumly. "Though I read that there are twenty thousand bars in B. A."

It began to get dark and insects came out of their lairs and rats poked their heads out of their holes. Every now and then some woman in one of the cells would let out a blood curdling yell. I began to think about a steak smothered in onions which wasn't likely to be on the menu in this boarding house and that made me feel very melancholy. And then the key turned in the iron door and it opened with a clang, and who came to call on us but the red-headed woman!

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She was dressed just the way she had been at the races and she stood there looking at us with a wooden expression.

Behind her was the police captain, his hat in his hand, and a couple of the cops who had pinched us.

I nudged Dick. "Say something," I whispered. He turned his head away.

"Come out, *señores,*" Rita said in a very cold tone.

I jumped up and Dick pulled me down again on the cot.

"No, thank you," he answered. "We are very comfortable right here."

"Are you nuts?" I exclaimed.

"Señor Van Hooven," she said sharply, "kindly follow me. I have secured your release."

"Couldn't think of it. We don't want to be released."

"But surely you don't want to remain in this vile *carcel?*" she exclaimed excitedly. "Are you hurt, *señor?* Have they wounded you?"

"My friend and I don't care to be under any obligations to you, *señorita,*" said this numskull. "Kindly close the door and leave us in peace."

I JUMPED up. "You speak for yourself," I said indignantly. "I'm much obliged to you, miss, and I accept your kind invitation to get out of this pigsty, with pleasure."

Rita ignored me, came right into the cell and laid both her hands on his shoulders.

"*Señor,*" she said, "I know you are angry with me. I know that appearances are against me. I swear to you I can explain. There are reasons—doesn't my appearance in this place so soon after your incarceration demonstrate that your affairs are important to me?"

"Will you be kind enough to think of me, Dick?" I asked him. "Do I want to be eaten by rats before morning? Lady, if you'll stand aside I'll rush him out of here—"

"You lied to me and you cut me dead," said Dick. "And I loved you."

"Please believe me," she implored, her two hands clasped like she was praying. "I had to do what I did. There were reasons."

"What reasons?"

"How can I tell you here?" she exclaimed.

"Certainly she can't. Come outside, Dick, and find out her reasons," I pleaded, and I put my hands under his shoulders and lifted him to his feet. He let me push him out of the calaboose and she came along behind us with the police.

In the jail office, the police captain handed me a slip of paper. I looked at it and saw a thousand *pesos* written on it, so I passed it right over to Van Hooven.

"What's this?" he asked the police official, and he was told that it was a bill for damages to Madama's honky-tonk.

"Give it to me," said Rita. "I shall pay it."

Dick laughed and drew out a roll of bills. Not being so thorough as American cops, they hadn't frisked us before slamming the cell door on us.

"Cheap at the price," he said, laughing. "Rita, you should have seen Buck pitch coconuts."

She laughed like a kid and thrust her hand inside his left arm and sort of nestled against him.

"I am sure I should have enjoyed it," she declared. "But, my friend, you are bruised and disheveled. You are badly hurt."

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"Nothing but a very pleasant brawl," he assured her. "Now about those explanations?"

"On the way to your hotel I shall tell you everything," she assured him. "My car is outside."

There was an enormous foreign limousine standing in front of the jail with an Indian chauffeur behind the wheel. The police captain opened the door, kissed the hand of Señorita Calavero and helped her in. He then delivered a long speech in Spanish about how sorry he was that he had not given us better accommodations, but Dick cut him short by getting into the car, and I shot in on his heels and slammed the door.

"Before you say a word," said Dick severely, "I wish to inform you, *señorita,* that neither I nor my friend are imbeciles. We take no interest in your local politics and we know nothing about the good or bad qualities of your government. The only reason for our joining the party of General What's-his-name was that you were a member of it. I fell in love with you at first sight. I'm the kind of man who will do anything for the woman he loves and who is capable of strangling her if she double crosses him. If your only interest in me was to tie me up with those cutthroats in that cellar, I'll report their activities to the government and then leave Buenos Aires forever. Also, I know when a person is lying, and you better talk straight. Proceed."

SHE was smiling at him all the time and her eyes were shining. She put out her hand and laid it on his right sleeve. Dick shook it off.

"No vamping," he warned. "I've found out a lot about you to-day, *señorita.* Tell your story."

"It is very simple," she said. "I am engaged to be married to a very bad man. He is the Minister of War. He has learned that I am active among the revolutionists and he threatens to put me in prison. This morning he ordered me to lunch with him at the Jockey Club and accompany him to the races. I had no choice."

"Yes, yes," said Dick skeptically. "Go on."

"I do not wish you to provoke the enmity of that man," she said. "So I do not tell you that I am breaking our engagement to lunch with him. You are an exceedingly reckless person, my friend. So, when I encountered you at the track, I feared you would say something indiscreet and General Villa would have you assassinated. It seemed best that I do not recognize you. So, you see? And you forgive me?"

"Well," said Dick, who couldn't resist her smile very long. "Sounds sort of fishy. How do you happen to be here?"

"On my return from the races I was informed by one of our agents that you two gentlemen had fought with and injured many persons and were in jail at the Boca. As my escort had returned to the government building, I took my car and came to offer my services. So, it is very simple, is it not?"

"Maybe. How about spending the evening with me?"

"Unfortunately, I cannot do that."

"Dining with him, eh?" he said.

She shook her head and laughed. "No, *señor.* And, if you wish to see me this evening, you may do so. You may see me for a couple of hours—"

Dick gave her both his hands and laughed gleefully. "All is forgiven," he declared.

"Yet I shall not be with you," she finished, smiling broadly. "You may

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see me at the stadium. I am playing for the blues with Señorita MacShane, whose partner has been taken ill."

"You're going to play *jai alai*, with professionals, before a lot of cafs who will bet on you or against you?" he asked in a horrified tone.

"Come off," I protested. "What's good enough for Fiora is good enough for any red-headed dame that ever lived."

She gave me a friendly smile. "Your companion is charming," she told Dick, "and he admires the Señorita MacShane, eh, *señor?*"

"You said it, lady," I answered.

"It is a very noble sport, Señor Van Hooven," she told Dick. "I have played it from childhood. I am called the best woman amateur in the Argentine. Tonight our women play the Basques from Europe—a most important match—and Señorita Manridez is ill. I consider it an honor to play in her place."

"It's degrading," he protested. "How can your people permit it?"

"I do as I please. It is particularly obnoxious to my fiancé," she said.

"That's different," Dick answered with a complete change of tone. "I wonder if there are any seats to be had."

Rita opened her purse and produced two tickets. "The game starts at ten o'clock," she said. "Have you ever seen one?"

He nodded. "In Cuba. I didn't know women played it."

"Very few women play well. I am one of the few," she said proudly.

Dick looked at his watch "It's seven forty-five," he said. "You could dine with us."

"Be discreet, my friend. In your interests we must not be seen together."

"You don't like me," he said dismally.

She took his hand. "From the first moment I saw you, I liked you. I never before met a man whom I liked so much. We shall have meetings, but you must let me arrange them. Remember, our conventions are not like those in North America. And now we are close to the center of the city. It will be better if you descend and take a taxi to the hotel. *Adios,* my Americans."

She spoke to the chauffeur and in a moment we were standing on the sidewalk watching her car disappear in the distance.

"Buck," said Dick to me, "without a single exception, she is the most beautiful, the most intelligent, the most wonderful girl in the world."

"You ought to have that set to music," I told him. "So everything is oke, again, and we stay in this village?"

"Why, certainly," Dick declared. "Rita was acting for the best. And what daring for a delicate girl like her to venture into the Boca to get us out of that bad smelling jail!"

I thought she must have known the ropes down there to be able to work it, but I was getting sense in my old age so I didn't say anything. And then a taxi came along and in a few minutes unloaded us at the Palace Hotel.

CHAPTER IX.

RIOT!

WE were a couple of tough looking objects as we crossed the lobby, but the natives were too polite to say anything about our appearance.

"Quick change," said Dick when we were in our rooms. "We need cocktails after what we have been through. Better put on evening clothes. We're

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so battered they might not let us into the bar if we don't dress up."

When we arrived in the bar it was well filled. In the center of the room was a long table, at one end of which was sitting the Duke of Rugborough. He waved a hand to us and motioned us to sit at the other end. There were eight men between us and him on one side of the table and seven on the other side. Everybody nodded and smiled at us and the fellow on my right said his name was Carter and he worked for the First National Bank of Boston that had a branch down here.

Dick ordered cocktails, and in a couple of minutes the waiter was back with a huge tray on which were eighteen drinks and he began to pass them along the line.

"Your order, *señor,*" said the waiter, grinning at Van Hooven.

"As you are strangers," said Carter, "I had better explain a quaint Argentine custom. The first man who sits at this table buys himself a cocktail. As each person comes to the table he buys a round of drinks. The expense to the first comer is slight—the cost of one cocktail—but those who come last find it expensive. Your friend, for example, is purchasing eighteen drinks."

I jerked my finger at the Duke of Rugborough.

"He was the first, wasn't he?"

Carter grinned. "I don't know how he does it. He is always the first."

"Which means," said Dick, "that this will be Bugsy's eighteenth cocktail."

"Exactly," answered Carter.

I nudged Dick. "Lucky thing Rita didn't walk out on us after your cordial reception," I told him. "The duke wouldn't pass up seventeen free drinks to get the Queen of England out of jail."

"Pardon me," said Carter. "You are Congressman Jervis, I believe."

"None other," Dick said quickly.

"Are you aware you have a black eye, Congressman?" asked Carter.

"You ought to see the other feller," I said to that. "Dick and me had a little argument with thirty or forty bozos down at the Boca."

"You're fortunate you didn't land in the Bay. How did you escape?"

Dick rocked with laughter. "The Congressman gave them his visiting card," he said, "and they couldn't do enough for us, after that."

This Boston man was curious, but Dick winked at me not to tell him any more and, after we had our cocktails, we left. Rugborough was too sunk to notice our departure.

WHEN we arrived at the stadium a mob was pouring into the place; one hundred per cent male. We passed the ticket taker and were shown to our seats, which were in the second row of a grandstand that must have seated a couple of thousand. Of course I had heard of this game called *jai alai* and was going to take a squint at it in Cuba, but there were too many cabarets. Dick got into conversation with an Englishman on his left who told him that it was invented by the Basques, who are a kind of Spaniard, in Europe, and only recently had become popular in B. A.

While they were talking, I was looking over the layout. Having heard that it was nothing but handball except they hit the ball with baskets instead of gloves, I was surprised to find it such a showy establishment and I couldn't see why a handball game would draw a crowd of a couple of thousand. The way I had looked at it, being the best handball player on the Yankees, I could

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get down there and with a little practice clean up the best of these comical Argentines.

Still, it was the biggest handball court I ever saw. It was more than two hundred feet long and thirty-six feet wide and paved with cement. The ends and left side of the court were built of smooth granite blocks fully forty feet high and the walls were marked with lines a good deal like a handball court. The right side of the court was open and that's where the grandstand was placed. The floor was divided into squares twelve feet on a side. I didn't know any handball player who could use a court as big as this and I began to sit up and take notice.

Betting commissioners were passing through the crowd, and there was a betting ring under the grandstand where the bookies were yelling. Not knowing how to bet on this funny game, Dick and I decided to wait a while. The Englishman said that you could bet right up to the finish of the game but that the odds kept changing. He also said that the Basque women would clean up the Argentines because they had had more experience and because one of the professionals of the Blue team was ill and an amateur was taking her place.

Dick immediately pulled out a roll of bills and offered to bet ten to one on the local team, but the Bluenose said he never made bets.

The racket made by the crowd was enough to drive you wild. Each man seemed to be yelling all the time and it wasn't the kind of noise made by a baseball crowd, but a shrill *yip-yip-yip!* A brass band proceeded to make more noise and kept it up until ten minutes past ten when there was a flourish of trumpets and the players and the officials marched in.

The Basque women were in white. There were four of them, two regulars and two substitutes, because it seemed that people could get hurt. I saw Fiora the minute she stepped upon the floor and I jumped to my feet and yelled, "Hurray for MacShane!" A lot of people joined in and others hissed and cheered for other players. Dick had hold of my arm and was staring at Rita Calavero, who had her red hair tucked under a blue cap and who was taller than the other three Blues.

All the girls wore sleeveless shirts and shorts, with bare arms and legs. The Basque dames were small but muscular and dark and ugly. Fiora was slender and shapely and her skin was dazzling white. She waved her basket to the crowd and they cheered their heads off. They cheered for the other Argentine women professionals, but when Rita was introduced there were more jeers than cheers. Dick jumped up and looked around belligerently, but there were no jeerers within punching distance. The Englishman told us they gave her the razz because she was an amateur.

Well, the game started. Fiora and a swift but skinny Spanish girl went in for the Blues, and Rita had to sit on the sidelines with the other substitute. They played it something like handball and something like squash, except they caught the ball in the racket instead of slamming it back with the racket or the hand, and they could throw instead of volleying, if they didn't delay too long, which was a fault. The first ball from the Basques was a very long high one that was h e a d e d for the far end of the court, but Fiora was down there like a flash and sent it back hard, swift and low. I opened my eyes at the way those girls c o u l d keep the ball in the air.

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They could catch it on the fly or take it on the first bounce and the amount of ground they covered would make a woman tennis player drop dead of heart failure in five minutes.

SPEED, speed, and more speed; that was what they had to have.

My little Fiora—of course I had only seen her once, but that's the way I felt about her—my Fiora was the best player of the four, but the girl who was working with her was the worst. First thing you know the Basques were out in front. As most of the crowd had bet on them, the saps were hollering their heads off and I howled for Fiora until I didn't have any voice left.

"Why don't they put Rita in?" Dick kept muttering. "Rita'll show 'em, she'll show 'em."

But the first intermission came without Rita getting into the game, and it happened when the Basques scored thirty points and won the first match. The Englishman said that three matches would be played. The girls who had been in the game ran for the dressing rooms followed by the others. As the Basques had won, thirty to twenty-two, the odds lifted and Dick nodded to me and we went down to the ring to bet our shirts on Fiora and her gang.

When we got there, they put up a sign saying that Señorita Rita Calavero would play in the second match with Señorita MacShane and Dick took it as a personal insult that the bookies boosted the odds on the Basques from three to one up to four to one. He laid a thousand *pesos* against the Basques and I went into my jeans for five hundred, all I had until next pay day.

Back we went to our seats and, in a few minutes, the teams came on and the referee blew his whistle. When Rita strolled onto the court, a lot of people in the stands began to whistle and catcall and shout nasty things at her.

It seemed that most of these eggs had bet money on the Blues and were sore because an amateur had been rung in on them, and there were others who thought it was all right for the professionals to appear with the arms and legs bare, but as Rita was a lady and as the conservative element didn't approve of the way she busted all conventions in Buenos Aires, they thought this was a grand time to stage a demonstration.

At that time I didn't know much about these South American customs and habits, which I found out all about later. Of course I had noticed that there never seemed to be any respectable looking women in the hotels or restaurants at night and Bugsy had said something about their only being around alone during the afternoon in the shopping streets, but I never dreamed that things were what they were.

It seems that they bring up these Spanish girls very strict. They never go out without their mothers or some old woman they call the *duenna* and they are not allowed to make a date with a fellow even to go to a show.

As soon as a girl is old enough to be married her folks give a party and invite young men with their mothers and fathers and have a nice little evening when the kids are allowed to dance with the old people watching them like a cat watches a mouse. If they don't make a deal with the parents of one of the men invited to the first ball, they give more parties and finally hook up a marriage.

Of course there isn't much a fellow

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and girl can get away with right in front of the fathers and mothers and all the fun of going round with a girl is lost. After they are engaged, if you think there is any let-up on the spy business, you're crazy. The engaged young man calls on the girl and her mother. Probably he never even gets a kiss before the wedding but he goes through because it's the custom.

Now if you ever went to one of these Spanish countries you probably noticed that there is a balcony on every house and the reason for the balcony is what I'm going to tell you.

The man takes his bride to their new home, usually his parents' house, and they settle down to married life. Every night after dinner he kisses his wife and says, "Come, darling," and he leads her up to the second floor and says, "Now, precious, have a nice pleasant evening with your knitting."

After that he puts on his hat and coat and he locks the door leading to the second floor, and then he locks the front door and he goes out to spend the evening with the gang.

After he has gone the loving wife knits a little while, or talks to her mother-in-law, who also has been locked in, and finally they go out and sit on the balcony and dish the dirt with the women on the next balcony, who have also been locked in, until bed time.

In the meantime the husbands have gone to their clubs where they play pool—that is, if they are respectable. If they're not, they go to the cafés or to the Follies Bergère where there are a lot of dames brought from France by the white slavers, and they buy wine and have a good time until the small hours of the morning.

Now this is the way it has always been and from a man's standpoint what could be sweeter? They like things as they are; they don't take any stock in this idea we have in the United States that a married woman has a right to enjoy herself. They won't even let their wives see American motion pictures which show married women out with their boy friends raising ructions. If one of their wives attracts the attention of a guy who happens to be passing under the balcony, said affair is reported by the *duennas* and the husbands sharpen their carving knives. That is how a lot of Americans who saw good-lookers making eyes at them from up above happened to die very sudden.

Of course I'm talking about society people, not the common folks. Nobody cares what the peasantry do except their husbands and they stay at home nights because they haven't the price to do anything else.

THE point of all this is that Rita Calavero had busted all the rules. She ran around alone and she did what she pleased and she refused to marry anybody that could lock her up and confine her to a balcony. So, when this wealthy heiress walked out in a costume that was a lot more modest than a Hollywood bathing suit, all the aristocratic husbands in the stadium were shocked and they told her what they thought of her in very impolite language.

None of all this worried Rita, who waved her left hand with the long narrow racket on it to the crowd and started to serve the ball to the Basque dames. Mind you, the boys in the stands had nothing against these professional pelota players. What these women did wasn't likely to cause a lot of high toned Argentine women to make trouble for their husbands. Aside

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from the fact that they thought that Rita would cause them to lose their bets, they were against her because she was a bad example. So, a very indignant husband threw a beer bottle at her.

Dick Van Hooven gave a howl of rage, climbed over the men in front and jumped right down upon the court. Rita Calavero caught that beer bottle in her basket and, being red headed and what goes with it, she slammed it right back into the crowd, regardless of who was hit. She knocked out a bookmaker which was of no consequence whatever except that it was a terrible breach of decorum for a player to resent anything done by the paid spectators. And a dozen beer bottles went flying at Rita Calavero, all of which she ducked with neatness and agility. Those bottles that didn't shatter into pieces on the concrete were immediately tossed back by Dick Van Hooven and the crowd decided that it didn't like him.

It ain't likely that any members of a male audience would have murdered a beautiful girl like Rita, even if she was a home breaker and a bad example, but they saw no reason why they shouldn't tear Dick into little pieces, so I had to get down there and help him toss beer bottles.

I guess it would have been Custer's Last Rally for me and Dick, for we were all alone as the officials had rushed the girls off the court, but it occurred to those who were sure that they were going to lose their bets that it would be a swell idea if there was a general riot which would put a stop to the evening's entertainment and call off all bets. So, in about half a minute, there were a hundred men on the court with us and they were not only slugging us but they were slamming one another.

The last thing I remember was seeing Dick hitting out in all directions, then something landed on me like a few tons of bricks and I went down.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

The Name "Argosy"

ROMANCE and glamour surround the little-known origin of the name "Argosy." It is only natural to guess that the word comes from the good ship Argo, on which the Greek adventurer Jason set sail in quest of the Golden Fleece; but this does not happen to be the case.

Back in the 1500's, the richest commerce of the civilized world was carried on by the Adriatic ports of Venice and Ragusa. Stately vessels laden with "topazes, and cinnamon, and gold moidores" sailed the seven seas, from India to America, from Africa to England. The republic of Ragusa had been a seaport since the seventh century, and was then the leading port of the world. So the finest treasure ships were called by the English, with the blithe disregard of spelling which characterized the time, "Ragusyes" or "Aragusyes" or "Argosyes."

Such is the colorful and romantic history of the name. Bancroft, the historian, adds: "By the Venetian law, no slave might enter a Venetian ship, and to tread the deck of an Argosy of Venice became the privilege and the evidence of freedom."

D. Wynkoop.

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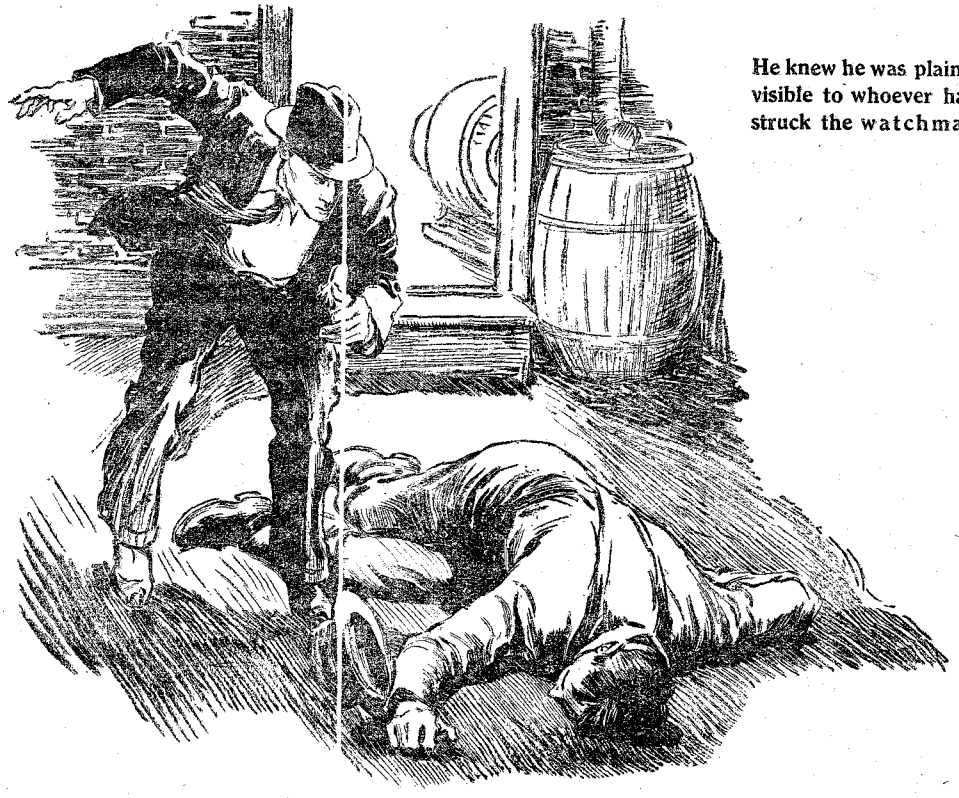

He knew he was plainly visible to whoever had struck the watchman

Burning Dust

By RALPH R. PERRY

Only one man in the quarry town could have thought of that ghastly death scheme—and he was the type to try again

NOT simply to murder him. That hadn't been the idea. The scheme had been to murder him horribly—to squash him like a bug by a three-hundred-foot fall, to leave his body a sickening sight for those who must gather it for burial.

Bruised, bleeding at the mouth, nauseated by the shock of an attempt on his life which he had survived he knew not how, Wally Devries clung to the side of the quarry hoisting-bucket, big enough to hold five tons of limestone rock. Beneath him gaped one of the deepest man-made chasms in the country, a round pit with vertical walls of whitish limestone. A quarter of a mile from rim to rim and three hundred feet deep, the shadows were already dark at the bottom of the pit, though the sun was just setting.

Over the center of this vast hole in the ground the quarry bucket dangled by a single thin steel rope which passed through a block that traveled on a heavy suspension cable leading across the quarry from side to side. In this bucket the rock was hoisted, and the

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quarrymen were lowered to their work. Wally had been descending in it, alone, to make his regular daily inspection after quitting time.

He and the bucket had traveled out along the suspension cable, to the center of the quarry. He had hung poised for an instant in mid-air, as always, while leather-cheeked Bill Perkins, the hoistman in the engine house at the quarry's edge, had checked the forward motion of the bucket and reached out for the handle of the pony brake which would lower it gently to the bottom of the quarry.

At that critical second had come the dull *boom* of exploding dynamite. Wally had seen the suspension cable slip from the saddle of the mooring tower directly behind the engine house, had seen the wooden sides of the engine house collapse, and the suspension cable drop loosely. At the same moment he felt himself falling.

Then he had been jerked, twisted, spun, flung up by the elasticity of the cable; dropped again, over and over, while the cable vibrated up and down across the quarry like a great violin string and the heavy iron quarry bucket danced and tipped like a tin pail jerked about on the end of a string.

Eyes tight shut, fingers clamped on the bucket rim, heels flying, he had survived. But now that the bucket dangled motionless in mid-air again, he had no doubts. No accident, this, but the calculated deed of a murderer—a murderer willing to slaughter Bill Perkins and crippled old Absolom Javitt, the quarry watchman, if need be, in order to dash Wally Devries to a horrible death. A murderer who must be insane, for every man in Stonehaven had reason to like Wally. He had saved their jobs for all of them by preventing a shutdown of the quarry. They owed him their livelihood—to a man—and his reward was that one of them had schemed to wreck the quarry, to ruin Nance Bennett, to impoverish the village and to risk the lives of two fellow workmen in order to *squash* him!

WALLY DEVRIES possessed the mathematical, exact, and logical mind of the born engineer. If a derrick lifts a ten-ton weight, the stress on boom and backstay is just so much, neither more nor less. The safe working load for a quarter-inch manila rope is a thousand and sixty pounds. Therefore, if Wally inspected a rope and found it sound, he would swing a half-ton weight on it with confidence, no matter how thin and weak the rope might look in comparison with the size of its burden.

To push calculations to the limit in that fashion takes courage. Wally had it. Even good engineers figure a limit of load, divide their own figures by four, in order to be safe, and in actual practice often shade that dividend by ten per cent. But once Wally figured what a machine or a man could endure, he made them take it. Cautious rivals called him reckless; nevertheless, by driving ahead he had made a success of the Stonehaven Quarry, and had achieved an enviable reputation.

He had come to Stonehaven to close the quarry and to dismantle the machinery. The pit, he was told, was too deep. All the profit was dissipated by the cost of hoisting the limestone three hundred feet to the surface.

He found a discouraged community, bewildered at the prospect of losing the only local industry, which had supported the town for three generations. He found apathetic owners, reconciled to failure and ready to live on the interest of the little money they had saved,

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rather than risk their capital in continuing the business.

The one bright spot was the principal stockholder, Nancy Bennett, granddaughter of the founder of the quarry. At their first meeting, her beauty made Wally catch his breath. Nance was tall, blond, with gray eyes and long, dark, curling eyelashes. The description is inadequate, for her beauty lay as much in her manner as in her perfection of feature. She was the sort of girl whom men not only admire, but marry.

Wally fell in love with her at once. Yet there was something amiss. Within a month he realized that the gray eyes smiled rarely, whatever her lips might do, and that the smile never lasted more than a few seconds.

He thought that she was worried over the quarry. To Nance, a shutdown spelled poverty. Wally made up his mind to change all that. He inspected, calculated. The costs of hoisting were high, and no mistake. But the blasting costs, the handling costs, and the costs of burning the limestone in the kilns two miles from the quarry were also excessive. Moreover, once the stone was hoisted, it could be delivered to the kilns, and from the kilns to schooners loading in deep water, by gravity. What was lost in hoisting could be saved in the remaining processes.

Wally assembled his figures. He could save a cent a ton here, two cents there, a tenth of a cent elsewhere. Added together, a dozen small savings figured up to a profit. The local banker offered to supply the capital needed to make the changes which Wally recommended, provided Wally would agree to stay on in Stonehaven as resident engineer. Stonehaven was jubilant—yet Nance, for whom Wally had done the thing, hardly seemed to care. Her eyes were grateful, but they were not gay. She smiled—really smiled—no oftener than before.

She was the finest girl Wally had ever met. He was sure of that. He drove ahead—to the limit, as he did in all things. In less than a year, Nance wore his ring; and if he was no nearer to an understanding of the shadow that hung over her, he had at least no doubt of her love. Knowing the warmth of her affection, Wally slowly forgot that she had been a problem. They had everything to look forward to.

Or rather, they had seemed to have. Hanging over a three-hundred-foot abyss in an iron bucket, staring at a shattered engine house, a wrecked mooring tower, and a sagging suspension cable, Wally changed his mind. He had saved Stonehaven, and the town now repaid him—with dynamite.

A stranger who comes to a small New England town and wins the best job and the prettiest girl is often unpopular, but Wally knew that he was an exception to the rule. A personal enemy could have shot him from the thickets beside the road as he drove past in his car. The present attempt on his life passed the limits of jealousy. Studying it in hard cold anger, the outstanding fact was that he had been destined for a horrible death. The intention had been to leave his shattered body as a threat—a dreadful lesson.

Threat against what? Lesson to whom? Not to him. Had the plan not miscarried he ought to have been dead or dying three hundred feet below. Only the strength of his fingers had saved him.

THE sound of the explosion had brought the quarrymen back as fast as their automobiles could be turned around in elm-shaded streets. Passersby had leaped onto the running

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boards. The chief of police was on the way, the siren on his car wailing. Out of the big yellow house on the top of the hill Nance ran bareheaded, dashing across the fields. Wally waved his hand. She waved back. But her pace did not slacken.

Wally watched her dash into a crowd of men laboring to clear the débris of the explosion away from the hoisting machinery. Bill Perkins and old Absolom, the watchman, were dragged out of the wreckage. Both were cut by flying splinters of plank, but they were able to stand. Ten minutes after the explosion, the winch was again turning. Slowly and carefully, with groans and gasps from the crowd at every tremor in the suspension cable, Wally was drawn back to solid ground.

Nance leaned over the bucket rim to help him out. He grinned, caught her around the waist, and hugged her tight. Her face was white, and a pulse was beating noticeably in her throat. Even in his arms she shivered.

"It's all right. I'm okay. Honest!" he whispered. To show how little he was injured, he vaulted from the bucket and climbed to the top of the loading platform, where he could look down upon the men.

"Boys," he called out, "we've something to settle here and now. You've looked at the wreckage. I guess you can see that some one doesn't exactly like me." Broad-shouldered and ruddy-cheeked, with black hair curling close to his head, Wally paused. Despite the streak of blood on his face he had never looked more powerful, nor felt more aggressive. He waited for the crowd to smile at the understatement. No one did. His effort to diminish the tension in the air by beginning his speech in a semi-humorous vein was a flat failure.

"Naturally, I'd like to know who that some one is," Wally went on firmly. "But get this straight—I don't want to put any one in jail. That would be damn' little satisfaction to me. I want to make this quarry a success. That's all I've ever wanted, and it's all I want now."

Wally paused. "I'm a stranger here. As far as I know, my slate is clean with all of you. Instead of cutting wages, I've cut costs. Your pay checks are now larger, and the percentage of accidents is less since I took hold.—But to hell with that stuff! I'm trying to talk like a man, not like a bookkeeper . . .

"If any of you know anything—if you only *suspect* anything that will explain this—explosion—speak up! I'm not asking you to snitch on a neighbor or a fellow workman. If the guy who did this is here, he needn't be afraid to admit it. All I'll ask him to do is to leave town—leave it for good. If there's a grudge against me or against this quarry, let's drag it out into the open and have a look at it here and now. I'll talk anything out, or fight it out . . .

"I see Chief Wiggin over there, poking around the mooring tower for a clue. I wish he'd come in. I don't care much who set the blast off. I want to know *why*. That explosion was a crazy stunt. It seems to have been aimed at me; but if it had happened half an hour earlier, a dozen of you boys might have been killed. Look at the thing from that angle. We've got a job of work to do here. Let's tell what we know, so that we can do it. That's all. I'm listening."

There was a murmur of approval and a stir in the crowd. Facing Wally, a semicircle formed with Bill Perkins and old Absolom in the cen-

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ter. From the rear spoke Wiggin, the grizzled chief of police.

"Ain't no ashes of a fuse 'round the moorin' tower. Ain't no marks of detonator wires in the dust, neither. Footprints close by hev all been tromped out, but I circled wide. Seems to me like one of them two must have set her off, Mr. Devries."

LEATHER-CHEEKED Bill Perkins spat in the whitish dust that covered the ground everywhere. "Weren't no one but me and 'Som nigh in the engine house. That I kin swear to," he drawled. "The hull town kin guess, but I seen something. The blast pinned me down against the winch, but I wasn't knocked out. I c'ud a helt the pony brake, even if there hadn't been no automatic safety deevices.—Right after the blast, movin' through the dust outside the door, seemed to me like old 'Som was a-windin' her in."

"I never set no blast. Wasn't I right front of it?" snarled the watchman.

He was an unlovely figure; an old man, seventy or even eighty years old, with white hair and unshaven white whiskers streaked with dust. Tall and gaunt to emaciation, he stood with one hip thrown sidewise. Long ago, his right foot and his right hand had been blown off in an accident. The cork hand and foot did not fit well. Yet despite age and weakness he glared at the crowd—which stared back with a hostility for which Wally was at a loss to account.

"I don't know nothing about it," he continued. "But go on and blame me fer it if ye like. Ye always hev!" Absolom snarled.

"What about the string?" called Wiggin.

Absolom turned, his forehead crimson. "Yes, I wound up a fishline!" he spat. "I had it dryin' against the wall, and I'm too poor to lose it. Make a lot of that, Seth Wiggin! Ye're a Bennett cop, and ye know who pays ye! A Bennett cop and a Bennett quarry and a Bennett town! The hull parcel of ye are Bennett's—even him." A dusty thumb jerked over the old man's lean shoulder at Wally. "He's hers! But me, I ain't owned!" Absolom shrilled. "I guess ye all know thet, drat ye!"

"I'll take a look at that line!" Wiggin retorted.

He was thrusting through the crowd when Nance stepped up to the old man, her hand outstretched. She did not speak, but instantly Absolom handed her a hank of cheap cotton fishline on a wooden frame.

"I'll keep it," said said to Wiggin. The policeman frowned, but Nance had turned her back toward him. She glanced at the hook, which was stuck into the wooden frame, reeled off a yard of the line, and wound it up again.

Absolom grinned into her face. "Are ye satisfied now, grandniece?" he jeered.

"Perfectly satisfied — granduncle," she replied evenly. She slipped the fishline into the neck of her dress, and turned to the crowd, her face as white as the limestone quarry walls.

"Please go home," she entreated. "After all, no one has been badly injured."

To Wally's amazement, the crowd seemed to understand. A man in the rear turned on his heel. Another offered Nance a lift in his car.

She shook her head. "I'll walk back across the fields with Mr. Devries—if he is able," she said.

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For a hundred yards Wally managed to walk through the grass at Nance's side without a word; but once out of earshot he saw no reason for further self-control.

"You called that dirty old cripple 'granduncle'!" he burst out.

"He was my grandmother's brother," Nance replied without turning her head.

"You snatched that fishline away from Wiggin, too!"

"That fishline was damp, and it was covered with dust—as it should have been. But the hook had been cut off with a knife, while the other end of the line was—broken. A piece was missing, Wally.—But that is not proof that Absolom was the one who fired the blast."

"Well, it's pretty strong evidence. He could have stolen dynamite easily enough; could have hidden it in the cross girders of the mooring tower. A few detonating caps scattered on the dynamite, with a heavy stone arranged to fall on them when he pulled a string—when I was right over the center of the pit—"

"*Don't!*" said the girl violently. "I—saw it all from the window of the living room." She walked on, not toward the big yellow house on the hill, but angling across the fields. Around the side of the slope another big house came into view. Though the dwelling had been pretentious fifty years before, the paint was now gone; the shingles were loose on the roof, and the broken windows were stuffed with wads of yellowing newspapers. Some old houses have beauty and dignity, however dilapidated they may be. This one spoke of savage, deliberate neglect.

Nance scrambled over a stone wall into a field grown up with brush.

"Careful now! Let me lead," she warned.

TEN paces further on, the ground dropped away. They halted on the edge of a smaller quarry, long abandoned, and now filled with still, green, sullen water. In the early twilight, the place was sinister. A stranger, pushing through the brush, might easily be trapped and drowned in the still, green pool before he could check himself.

"This is Absolom's old quarry, and that was his house you saw," said Nance. "I brought you here so that you'd understand—as far as a stranger can. Wiggin and I don't need evidence, Wally. We've lived in constant dread of this for years. But we need proof!"

"Steady!—Don't let your voice get shrill. Sit down and tell me about it," Wally soothed. "What you've said hasn't exactly made sense so far. You mean that Absolom set off that blast? And that you and Wiggin and the whole town are morally certain of it?"

"Yes!"

"And you've been expecting it for years?—Why, I've only lived in Stonehaven one year!"

"Absolom doesn't hate you. His idea was to injure me. He guessed that would be the best way to hurt me," said Nance dully.

"But why—?"

"Because I'm a Bennett! He hated my grandfather and my father. I'm the only one of the family that's left, so all his hate is now directed toward me. It's an obsession, of course. He's been a little mad for years, I think. Probably he's passed over into definite insanity at last. We've dreaded it for a long time." Nance's voice dropped. She stared into the pool. "Do you remember the anecdote of the golfer

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who had the right to shout, 'Boo!' once in the course of a match? He never shouted at all, but his opponent, because he was expecting every swing to be interrupted, let his game be ruined. That's what Absolom's done to the Bennetts. To-day, after nearly forty years, he has shouted 'Boo!' at last."

"Well, all right! But if I remember aright, the agreement was that the chap could only shout once."

"Don't joke, Wally! This is life, not an anecdote. Absolom's not through yet. He and grandfather opened the Stonehaven quarry as partners. They prospered until the hole got too deep for the conventional hoisting gear. Grandfather wanted to install electrical machinery, but Absolom thought it was too new-fangled. He pulled his money out, and started a quarry here. The rock wouldn't burn into a good grade of quicklime. The good rock is only in that one spot, as you know. Here's Absolom's quarry. This represents what has happened to his money. And he blamed the Bennetts for all of it. He said he'd been cheated and tricked.

"Grandfather appointed him general superintendent, but of course he wanted the deep hole to fail. He had to be fired; and he wouldn't leave town. He insisted that he be given work as a laborer, if that was all he was fit for. Soon afterward, his foot and hand were blown off. Then he made threats. Grandfather had ruined him, had crippled him he claimed; and he was going to get even."

"Your grandfather believed him?"

"Grandfather had reason to. Absolom meant what he said, and the whole town knew it. Every now and then he'd say a bitter word, such as you heard this morning. He was waiting his chance. Meanwhile, we either had to give him work at the quarry or let him starve. He was waiting—and so were we. After a few years, I think he began to enjoy being the cat and watching the mice play around his claws."

"DID he ever marry?"

"That was the worst. His wife died young, leaving him one boy. The son was working in the quarry when a rock broke away from the very top and crushed him horribly. Absolom wasn't ten feet away, Wally. He cursed us—as though we were responsible! We were sure that he was scheming to do something, but—he didn't! And now that he has acted, I haven't proof enough to put him in jail. I would, of course, even if he were ten times my grand uncle!—I'll be afraid now to have you out of my sight. We can't make him leave town, Wally! He owns his house. The only thing I can see for us to do is to close the quarry and go ourselves. He's too old to follow us."

Wally started. "You'd run?" he demanded. "From a cripple with one foot in the grave?"

Nance shrugged. "My mother and I have lived in terror all our lives, because my father refused to be afraid. I'm not ashamed to admit I'm a coward. Absolom's a monomaniac. He's turned homicidal. Rather than risk your life again, I'll fill the quarry with water until it looks like this one!"

"That'll finish Stonehaven," said Wally.

"Then I'll finish it! You're worth more to me than a town. I'm glad you do understand, and see the matter as I do—"

"But I don't!" said Wally. "I'm just beginning to see why you never smile. Your conjectures are most

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likely correct, Nance. I'm willing to agree that Absolom set off the blast. You've explained what has turned him insane, and why he's dangerous. Nevertheless, you're wrong in summing it all up. To run away won't help you."

"I think differently," the girl flashed.

"You've lived too long under the shadow of dread. Wherever we went, I'd still be an engineer, handling rough labor. Some workman threatens to knock my head off—and means it—and you'll be afraid again."

"I wouldn't be. For a stranger wouldn't be insane! He wouldn't be clever, patient, like Ab—"

"And how do you know?" said Wally. "We could argue the point for years, and get nowhere. Probably your father argued it with your mother— No, Nance." He smiled at her white, set face. "I don't aim to say 'No' to you often, but once or twice a man must say it," he went on gently. "I've added up your figures, and here's the answer I get: We'll retire Absolom on a pension, and send him back to live in his old house, with plenty of money. You and I will work the quarry. It's neither right nor decent for one half-crazy old man to make you and me wanderers or to take the work away from a town. We can't prosecute, and we can't run him out of Stonehaven. But we can make it clear to him that he's had his try and that he's failed. In the future he can look at us from over the fence."

"I wish that men had to wait, even a little," said Nance with slow bitterness. "A man always knows what's happening to him. He assumes that nothing ever happens to his wife. I suppose it's true that you've got to be a man. You said more than you dreamed that time." She smiled at him, and rose. "Add up the figures any way you like, but while you're away from me, be careful.—Please!"

"Of course I'll be careful!" Wally promised.

BUT he was not. Though he added up the figures of the problem by the abandoned quarry, he had mentioned only a subtotal to Nance. To pension Absolom, to cut his claws by banishing him outside the quarry fence, was only a small part of it all. Nance would never be free of dread until the menace was definitely removed. To Wally, the answer stood out as clearly and definitely as though the problem had indeed been one of mathematics.

Wiggin protested vehemently because Absolom was not arrested. Although a careful search of the wreckage and the quarry grounds uncovered no additional clues, the policeman argued that a few weeks in jail would frighten Absolom, even though the old man would have to be released eventually. Wally thought otherwise. Prosecution, he insisted, would only incite the man's insane mind to another attempt at revenge.

Nor did Wally relax his vigilance because Absolom received his "pension" with apparent gratitude. The old man retired to his dilapidated house. For a month he fished and pottered around the garden. As the time passed, Nance became more cheerful; but for Wally delay did not alter a single factor of the problem. He knew that Absolom still cherished his obsession. Therefore, the old man would again try to avenge the injuries which he fancied the Bennett family had inflicted upon him.

Nevertheless Wally was tricked when Absolom at last struck. The old man had schemed with insane cunning

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and shrewd judgment of the character of his victim.

Wally had just been to call on Nance, and was driving past the quarry on his way home. Suddenly the quiet of the summer night was shattered by three long blasts on the whistle at the quarry. That signal warned all Stonehaven that the quarry watchman needed help. Either a fire had broken out, or thieves were at work. Wally stopped his car by the side of the road, started to climb the quarry fence—and paused, though only for an instant.

Suppose the alarm was Absolom's doing? Wally had no fear of the cripple himself. The whistle would bring Wiggins and the fire department as fast as they could leap out of bed and dress. Within ten minutes, a dozen men would be at the quarry. But meanwhile, Wally might be able to nip the real trouble in the bud.

He scrambled over the fence and ran for the engine house, shouting to encourage the watchman. There was no reply. As Wally crossed the fields, he noticed that the usual lights were burning in the engine room. There was no sign of fire, or of trouble. The watchman's chair stood in the doorway. A newspaper and a lunch box were beside it. Wally halted, panting from the run. Nothing was amiss.

Nothing? His heart skipped a beat. At the edge of the fan of light cast through the open door lay a body. Wally jumped forward and crouched beside it, watching every shadow, unpleasantly aware that he was in the open, completely visible against the whitish dust that covered everything. The vast open pit of the quarry was nearby.

Nothing happened—not a sound, not a movement. Only the boom of the fire alarm in Stonehaven, beating to summon the volunteers, and very faintly, a whiff of smoke rising in the still summer air. But the smoke was not from the engine house; it came from the pit at his back.

Swiftly, Wally turned the body over. It was that of the new watchman. He was dead, the back of his head sticky with blood. He had been struck down with a club or a heavy stone. Two strides took Wally to the edge of the quarry. He grasped the curving top of the emergency ladder and swung himself over the edge, still unpleasantly aware that he was a perfect target for a shot from ambush. The vertical side of the cliff was a shelter. He looked down.

Far below, flames were leaping from the roof of the tool shed. He could visualize the crime. Absolom had stolen into the quarry and tossed a bucketful of kerosene onto the shed below. Then he had dropped a blazing rag tied around a stone. The watchman must have seen the rag flare up. He had blown the alarm, rushed out, and had been felled with a club. All of which was logical, except for the fact that the watchman had been struck in the back of the head. And the alarm had sounded just as Wally had driven by, too.

THE engineer cursed himself for his own cautiousness in dreading a shot from ambush. The instinct of danger warned him that Absolom had not retreated. The old man had been cunning enough to lie quiet, in the hope that Wally would do just exactly what he had done. Yet a cripple with failing eyesight and a cork hand could not be much of a marksman. A shot at Wally, when he was on solid ground, might only wound. But a wound as he was pulling himself over

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the top of the ladder—even the mere shock of a small charge of bird shot—would be plenty. The idea had never been simply to kill him, but rather to murder him horribly. To leave his body—

Coolly, silently, Wally accepted the challenge. He was in a bad fix, but not a hopeless one.

Wally squeezed himself behind the iron ladder. He braced his back against the limestone wall and locked his legs in the ladder rungs. Thus both hands were freed; his head was scarcely a foot below the edge of the cliff. He peered upward. It would be possible for him to seize a gun by the barrel. He could even catch Absolom by the ankle, if the old man walked too close to the edge.

On the road from Stonehaven the police siren shrilled. Wiggin was coming, with the fire engine clanging behind him. Absolom had to advance—and he was coming.

Over the edge of the cliff cascaded a bagful of dust. Most of it shot past Wally's face, but some fell on his lips and eyes. He wiped his face with his sleeve, winked and clamped his eyelids shut, unable to stifle a cry of pain. The dust burned and smarted horribly. It was quicklime, caustic as lye, it seethed and burned under Wally's eyelids.

Not much of the devilish stuff surrounded his eyes, for luckily he had had his head lowered at the moment the quicklime had been thrown. But there was enough of it to work its way into his eyes with fatal effect in a minute or two, unless he could get to water and wash it off. There was water three hundred feet below. Too far away. There was a tap in the engine house.

"Goin' to come up, or goin' to live blind?—I'm a-waitin' fer ye!" Absolom snarled softly.

Wally twisted to the outside of the ladder. Blindness was worse than quick death. He was ready to take bullet or gun butt. He flung one arm around his head, caught the curving ladder top and lunged upward.

Then he was clubbed—a swinging, two-handed blow that landed squarely on head and forearm. He swayed, half stunned, and snapped himself forward with a last desperate jerk. He tumbled over the ladder top, colliding with a lean body. Absolom fell. Wally clutched the cool steel of a shotgun barrel. His head was a whirling blackness streaked with fire. The old man punched and kicked. His blows were feeble, but Wally was fighting unconsciousness. He could only cling to the gun.

Absolom guessed his helplessness. He wriggled from beneath Wally's body, and was clear before the engineer could seize him. Wally swayed to his knees, his eyes streaming tears and still burning, hotter and hotter. Absolom had not retreated far; only to the enginehouse. There was a clang of steel against steel as he picked up some heavy quarry tool. A crowbar, or a sledgehammer. The cork foot thumped in the dust as he charged.

For Wally, with blinded eyes, there was but one defense, but one way to fight. He did not rise from his knees. Instead, he raised the shotgun over his head, muzzle to the front. It was a frail shield. To Absolom he must have appeared helpless. One crashing blow would beat down that guard. Confidently, the madman dashed in, a crowbar swung high.

At the sound of the feet in the dust, Wally thrust as though the shotgun were a sword. As the muzzle touched flesh, he pulled both triggers and toppled forward on his face.

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For him there was an instant of terrible suspense, but the boom of the shot was followed by—silence. Gropingly, Wally stretched out a hand. Absolom lay still. The two charges had ripped through his body just above the belt, but Wally did not pause to discover that. On hands and knees he crawled for the enginehouse, guided by the faint *drip-drip-drip* of a water tap.

WHEN Wiggin reached the quarry Wally was still scrubbing at his eyes, pausing under the tap to let the stream gush with all its force across his face. He called out that he was all right, and the policeman hastened toward the rising column of smoke. The sight of the two bodies turned him back.

Wally met him in the doorway. In the light, the engineer's face was red and raw. A cut in his scalp streamed blood, but his eyes were open and his sight was unimpaired. He was smiling.

"Ye would have it!" Wiggin rapped out, wildly excited. "I told ye to let me arrest him, Mr. Devries! You're livin', and I s'pose we all ought to be thankful; but by thunder, I cal'lated ye had more sense than to come rushin' in alone! Couldn't ye wait for me?"

"Don't bawl me out," said Wally. "If I'd waited, we'd have found a dead watchman—and no legal proof against a murderer. The only way out was for me to stand the gaff. Put out that fire, will you? I've got to hurry up to the big house and tell Nance that it's now safe for her to smile."

THE END.

A Colonial Racketeer

ALTHOUGH few persons realize it, New York has been the home town of "big shot" racketeers ever since the days of His Excellency Benjamin Fletcher, Governor of New York, who governed the city with his mob in 1695.

Governor Fletcher had many rackets which brought him large sums of easy money.

He controlled the permits for the "Red Sea Men," a seagoing mob of hi-jackers, known commonly as pirates. These gangsters were under such leaders as Tew and Coates, and in return for the "due encouragement" of Governor Fletcher they made him "suitable presents of Arabian gold."

Captain Coates turned over a ship valued at eight hundred pounds to Fletcher, the Governor's cut in the loot.

In payment for favors received, the townspeople gave to Fletcher expensive presents of heavy silver plate. All of these donors were entered in a little black book, and woe unto the man who failed to contribute to these "testimonials."

At election times Fletcher stuffed the ballot boxes, enjoining his henchmen to vote for the men he proposed as assemblymen, and threatening to have any one shot who voted contrary to his wishes. In short, he controlled the local government as no other gang leader has ever done, using the Army and Navy to back up his orders.

Albert Woodley.

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It charged faster than she could run

Wicked Eyes

By LOWELL THOMAS

There's no place like home in Africa, with rhinos in the garden and lions in the trail

OSA JOHNSON comes from Independence, Kansas, but she speaks Swahili like a native; and she has picked up a smattering of many other dialects of the tribes of Tanganyika and Kenya. Around campfires on the Athi Plains, with lions roaring in the offing, she listened to tall Buganda hunters telling tales of the King of Beasts. On the jungled slopes of the Alumbongo Mountains, in the heart of the gorilla country, she heard weird stories of the great apes told by roaming Batwa tribesmen. And in the Congo she studied the language and customs of the pygmies that dwell deep in the Itura Forest.

For more than twenty years she has been trekking the wild, savage places of the earth with her husband, Martin Johnson, the explorer. In the New Hebrides she was captured by cannibals; in the Solomon Islands she visited a "devil house," forbidden to women; and after adventures in Australia, Borneo, and the Malay Peninsula, she and her husband drifted to Africa. She came, she saw—and she capitulated to the spell of the Dark Continent.

Five hundred miles north of

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Nairobi, civilization's outpost in the big game country, she discovered a long lost lake lying in an extinct crater. Its beauty enchanted her, and there she and her husband built a permanent home. There it is that this exceedingly American, and exceedingly feminine little lady known to us as Osa Johnson, lives, surrounded by primitive black people and by wild animals that have yet to learn to fear man. Elephants raid her vegetable garden for sweet potatoes; at night lions roar and hyenas whine; and on the trail, rhinos dispute her right of way.

One day she was riding down a trail on her mule when a rhinoceros came pounding along behind her. Both animals were surprised and scared. The trail was narrow, hedged in by an impenetrable wall of vegetation. There wasn't enough room for the angry rhino to pass, so the mule bolted.

"It was the strangest race in history," she said, recounting her adventure. "I hung on for dear life while the rhino tried to escape from the mule and the terrified mule tried to escape the rhino."

A fork in the trail saved her from being trampled by the snorting wild brute. She never has liked rhinos, but she is always getting mixed up with the short-tempered, ill-mannered beasts.

Upon another occasion, while out picking mushrooms in the forest that comes right up to her back yard, she heard a crash and a loud snort. She had disturbed a rhino. He began to paw the ground furiously, swinging his head sullenly to and fro. His piggish little eyes glared at her balefully.

She was without a gun and the trees offered the only place of refuge. As she jumped to one the rhinoceros charged. Grasping a low-hung branch, she swung herself from the ground just as the irritable old fellow thundered past below. Climbing higher, she sat in the crotch of a limb, quaking but trying to keep quiet until the rhino departed. It seemed an age until she was able to descend in safety to the ground.

Once, while out after lion in Tanganyika, the boys were making camp when a strange native appeared. She had not seen many natives on her trek, for the tribes on the southern reaches of the Serengeti Plain are a sullen lot.

"B'wana want animals?" he asked gutturally.

"Lions," Bukari, the headman of the safari, answered gruffly.

Gesturing with both hands, the native jabbered away, punctuating his statements with emphatic nods of his kinky head. From Bukari, the headman, Osa learned that her visitor was prepared to guide them to the Tooma River district where there were lions.

MRS. JOHNSON had heard of the Tooma River, and knew roughly its location. The country it watered was the home of vast multitudes of game, and it was quite likely that the native was telling the truth. But she also knew that it was surrounded by deep dongas and valleys that were impassable to an automobile. Pointing to the car she said in Swahili:

"Can the rolling house go?"

"Yes," announced the black boy.

The native was as good as his word. Not only did he lead the safari to the banks of the Tooma, he also took Osa into the lion country. The plains swarmed with gigantic herds of topi, wildebeeste, gazelles, and zebras. She knew lions would be there, too.

Camp was made beside a small hill. The sun was nestling on the horizon, and long purple shadows were creeping over the plain. The night cries of

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prowling animals had not yet begun when, accompanied by Bukari, she drove the car to a spot about a mile from camp. Fifteen feet in front of the car the cameras were set up, and a short distance further on, a dead zebra was placed for bait. Then the native returned to the camp.

In the distance a lion roared. Osa strained her eyes toward the bait as the darkness deepened. Above her the starred vault of the heavens stretched to infinity. A faint breeze rustled through the branches of a small clump of trees at her back.

A slight noise ahead caught her attention. Osa threw the beam of her flash light on the zebra. Hyenas were at it. She yelled at them, but they wouldn't leave. She shut off her light, leaving them to their feast.

Of a sudden all was quiet. The hyenas had gone, as they always do when a lion approaches. The crunching of bones told her that a subject for her camera was at hand.

Again she threw the beam of her hand flash light on the kill. A huge lion sat up and blinked in its rays for a moment. Then he began to eat again. He didn't make a good picture, with his head down, and so she whistled softly. The great cat raised himself and lifted an ear inquiringly. Quickly she pushed the firing button.

But the flash light of the camera failed to work. The connections were wet, and so she took time to dry them. Again she whistled, and again the big cat raised himself, his eyes staring right into the camera. She shoved down the button, and the flash light let go with a tremendous crash.

The lion leaped into the air wildly, and plunged headlong toward the car. After the flare of the camera's flash light the beam of the hand light seemed puny, but it showed her the lion bounding forward in a great spring.

The lion hit the car head on. The car heaved up as though a giant hand had gripped it, knocking her rifle to the floor. The bewildered animal let out a roar that made her heart leap into her throat. With trembling hands Mrs. Johnson picked up the gun. But the uproar was over, and she saw that the lion had retreated into the darkness.

SHAKEN by her experience, she stepped on the starter. It wouldn't work. Also, the lights were off. With tense hands she tinkered with the starter button; she stepped on it again and it buzzed in return.

The noise of the car was answered by an angry growl. The lion was back. He was crouched near the dead zebra.

But there was no other way out. Behind were trees; ahead was the lion. Her heart was pounding like a trip-hammer. A clammy, cold sweat beaded her face, and shivers ran down her spine.

Slowly she drove toward the lion. The beast sprang upon the carcass of the zebra, growling and lashing his tail. Mrs. Johnson swerved to one side, trying to squeeze past, but with a roar the lion turned and leaped toward her. She had one brief glimpse of a pair of flashing wicked eyes.

At that moment Mrs. Johnson stepped on the gas. The car shot forward. The wheels bumped up as they went over the rear end of the zebra. She was now out in the clear. She heard the thud of the lion's body behind her as it hit the ground. But Osa didn't stop for another tilt with the Monarch of the African Jungle. She had had enough lion for one night.

THE END.

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Sting of the Blue Scorpion

By LORING BRENT

Author of "Cave of the Blue Scorpion," "Outlaw's Holiday," etc.

Peter the Brazen had, as the Chinese say, ridden tigers—but never two fighting tigers such as the mysterious Mr. Lu and his deadly rival

"I'll cure you of your dislike of me!" cried the mad surgeon

THE CHARACTERS:

PETER MOORE, called Peter the Brazen, an engineer, building a costly and elaborate hydro-electric system in the Shan Mountains in China, upon the order of a wealthy Chinese.

SUSAN O'GILVIE, a beautiful and wealthy young American woman, whom Peter loves but cannot marry because his pride cannot jump the barrier of her wealth. Kidnaped in Shanghai, she turned up at Peter's rough construction camp wearing a ragged coolie costume for disguise—only to be kidnaped once more, this time by a number of mysterious Chinese hillmen.

THE BLUE SCORPION, whose other name is MR. LU. He is the most sinister and the most powerful man in China—a fabulous, half mythological personage said to be several hundred

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years old. Susan and Peter, however, know that there is much truth in the rumors of his power, for they have once been his captives, having been released merely through one of his caprices, and only after taking oath that they would never reveal to any one his secrets. Mr. Lu is supposed to reside in an unbelievable palace beneath the Lake of the Flying Dragon.

BILL MONTGOMERY, son of a wealthy Western cattleman, and devoted admirer of Susan. She finds it impossible to return his regard. He has appointed himself her guardian, but he is as puzzled as Peter when Susan disappears for the second time. At first suspecting that Peter Moore had something to do with it all, he became belligerent. The fact that Peter was able to whip him doubtless had something to do with changing his opinion in this matter.

DR. LUIGI STRANG, an insane brain surgeon with hypnotic powers. His brain operations have given him a subtle command over certain individuals. He also is infatuated with Susan; but even more with the idea of discovering for himself Mr. Lu's secrets. Hence he was able to devil Susan until she became half hysterical and in a moment of weakness told much of what she knew about the Blue Scorpion. Now Dr. Strang has appeared at Peter's camp, and reveals that he is responsible for kidnaping Susan. At tremendous expense, he has procured the services of an army of hired Chinese soldiers. Knowing that only through Susan and Peter will he be able to reach the Blue Scorpion, he attempts to force Peter to assist him. Peter, knowing that he deals with a madman, only pretends that he will coöperate.

KAREN STRANG, the doctor's beautiful wife, who is jealous of Susan because Bill Montgomery, with whom she is obsessed, cannot give her the love she desires.

PROFESSOR AVERY VAN ZANT, once a patient of Dr. Strang's; now a slave to his every wish and command.

CHAPTER XV.

THE JADE LADY.

FIFTY horsemen picked their way, single-file, through a narrow pass in the mountains just south of the dam. Dr. Luigi Strang and Professor Avery Van Zant were, respectively, the first and second men in the line. The others were armed hillmen. The rising moon silvered their new rifles, sparkled on their new spurs. It had cost Dr. Strang a fortune to hire and caparison his "army." But he did not begrudge a dollar spent. Compared to the vast wealth he soon would control, his total expenditures were as a drop of water is to a mighty ocean.

He was exultant. The nearness of success intoxicated him, and the ease with which he had handled Peter Moore, reputedly so hard-boiled, put new plumes in his vanity.

"We can't fail now," he told his companion enthusiastically. "I compare myself to a mighty wave, sweeping everything before it. I am like Napoleon returning from Elba. I gain power as I advance. There is nothing I can't accomplish, Avery! I have the sense of having the world, here, in the very palm of my hand! I am indomitable!"

Perhaps half an hour's ride from the hydro-electric construction camp, the doctor remembered that he had left Bill Montgomery lying on the bunk in

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Moore's shack. He had intended to have him killed. But in his excitement he had neglected that detail.

Yet having recalled his negligence, he did not even rein in his horse. "I will attend to that conceited young ass later," he said. "Remind me, Avery, to have him shot."

Professor Van Zant said nothing. But when his mentor returned to his favorite theme, the irresistible triumph just ahead, the professor sounded a note of caution. He said in so many words that pride had been known to precede historic collapses.

"But nothing can halt me now!" the doctor declared. "I am, to all intents and purposes, already the master of the world! Nothing can stay me! This is a historic occasion, Avery—one of the times you have heard about—the time when a tide rises in a human life which makes one man the master of human destinies. This tide of mine will carry me to an overwhelming triumph!"

THEY came, at the end of an hour's brisk ride, to a hut that occupied the very center of a small plateau. It had once been a shepherd's hut—so many years ago that none of the hillmen with whom the doctor had talked could recall when it was last occupied.

All about the little hut, hillmen were standing or grouped about small fires. The doctor's army! His legion, the loyalty of which he had purchased with such an extravagant outlay of gold!

Lights were burning in the hut, and the door was open. Karen Strang was standing in the doorway, her slim figure silhouetted against the orange glow, her hair faintly gleaming like a golden cap.

She turned and went into the room as her husband and the other men rode up and dismounted. Dr. Strang told the professor to wait outside. The doctor strode into the hut. He swaggered.

"Wait outside with Avery. I have something to say to Susan," he said to Karen.

Karen's cool, brilliant blue eyes looked at him for a moment, then she said quietly, "Very well, Luigi. Is everything arranged?"

"Yes! Moore is absolutely acquiescent. He will do just what I say. Of course, he had no choice. He acknowledged my mastery of the situation." His wife went out.

He glanced at the pale girl standing in a shadowy corner. But he seemed unaware of her. He clasped his hands behind him and began to walk back and forth across the room, opposite a stack of rifles in a corner to the open door. Presently he paused long enough to shut the door, then he continued his restless pacing.

Susan followed him with expectant, apprehensive eyes. She was quite certain now that Dr. Strang was a madman, and she only wondered what form his eccentricity would take. Certainly, he was suffering from delusions of grandeur. His attitude was that of a conquering monarch. His eyes had a remote, staring quality that frightened her.

She saw that he was terribly excited; and she wondered if this excitement might not make him actually dangerous, if that brilliant, twisted brain might not strike off on almost any tangent.

When he spoke to her he was calm enough. He stopped pacing presently and came toward her, still with his hands clasped behind him. He came very close to her and looked down into

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her large dark eyes. He nodded his shaggy head several times. In his beard his wet red lips were smiling.

Softly he said, "Susan, you are very beautiful. You are the most beautiful woman in the world. You are so wistful! Your eyes are so soft, so appealing! Underneath your loveliness there is such fire, such valiance. I love you, Susan!"

Helplessly, Susan looked up into his intent black eyes. Her heart was racing. But she tried not to betray her fright. She felt that she must not lower her eyes from his for an instant; that the firmness of her will, directed through her eyes, was holding at bay, as if it were an animal, crouched, ready to spring, the insanity lurking in his eyes.

"I adore you, Susan. You are such a lovely little thing. So slim! So gallant! So charming!—You must know, of course, that that woman outside means nothing to me. She is cold and hard and selfish. I have no use for her; she does not count. She is already, as far as we are concerned, out of the picture. Perhaps I shall kill her. I haven't yet decided; there are so many things on my mind. But I wanted to take this time to reassure you. Don't be worried, my angel. You have nothing to fear. You are under my protection.—You understand me fully?"

SUSAN, wanting to scream, said through parched lips, in a thin little whisper, "I understand."

He took a deep breath, swelling out his chest. "You are to be the queen of the world, my angel! Yes—I am to be the king, and you are to be the queen."

There was now no expression in his eyes. Nothing but that terrifying, staring vacancy. Susan dared not utter the whimper of awful despair that was in her throat. White and expressionless, she only looked up.

Dreamily, he repeated, "You are to be the queen—my lovely, gallant little queen!—I will tell you my secret. I am going to kill Mr. Lu and possess myself of his secrets. I may be away for days—weeks—p e r h a p s months. But you will be safe. My queen is to have a bodyguard of three thousand men. While I am away, I shall be thinking of you—adoring you. Susan, you love me, don't you?"

Susan could not answer. Her hand flew to her mouth, as if to stifle the scream that hovered there.

"You must say you love me, Susan! It is very necessary. I have taken it for granted. Was I wrong in taking it for granted?"

Susan slid her hand down to her heart and kept it there. Dr. Strang's eyes looked blacker. His shaggy head came closer. He stared at her as if he would, by sheer will power, force that answer from her. His heavy, rumbling voice said, "Susan, you must tell me you love me! I must hear you say it!"

"I can't!" the girl cried.

"You mean—you don't love me?"

"No! No! No!"

He stepped backward, with a puzzled air, as if he had not heard aright. "I don't understand, Susan. You must love me. It is necessary."

Susan said to herself, "How can I stand any more of this? I'll have to scream! I'll faint.—But I *mustn't* faint!"

He had gone to a pile of luggage which was stacked against one wall. From it he selected a small black bag, the kind of bag that physicians often carry.

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He turned his head slowly and looked up at Susan. "You will have to be very patient," he said. He had opened the bag and was pawing about in it. "It is very necessary for you to love me, Susan," he said. "All my work is nothing, if I cannot feel that it is for you, that you are hopeful of my success. Life is useless without love. You are my love."

Dr. Strang paused, with his slim, white hands inside the black bag. There were sounds of movement outside. There were sharp cries—others. Then this agitation subsided.

The madman straightened up. In one of his hands was a small phial; in the other was a surgeon's knife.

Susan, now icy with terror, looked from one hand to the other, then at his face. He was smiling faintly as he came toward her.

"Susan, I am going to cure you of that strange antipathy you have toward me. It is necessary.—It will not hurt. I promise not to hurt you. All I will do is sever a very small nerve in the back of your brain. I won't have to cut through the bone. Generally, I cut through the bone, but I am going to spare you that. Lie down—face down—on that cot, my dear. I won't hurt you."

Susan screamed, "No!"

He said gently, almost pleadingly, "Must I use force? I would so much rather not use force.—It is for your good, Susan. You know I would not harm you."

SUSAN raced to the door, but Dr. Strang had evidently anticipated that. Before she could reach it, he was there. Panting, she tried to push him away. He had dropped the phial into a pocket. The scalpel he held in his teeth.

He seized her wrists in hands which, despite their fineness, might have been manacles. She could not move. Holding both wrists in one hand, he forced her toward the cot. But he did not immediately place her on the cot. He fumbled with his free hand at the back of her neck. Susan struggled, screamed. She could not escape that searching hand. It closed on her neck. She felt a sudden sharp pressure applied at the base of her brain. A white light seemed to burst in her brain.

Half conscious now, limp in his hands, she resisted no longer. She was aware of sensations, but her muscles had no response. She suddenly smelled a pungent liquid; but whether it was ether, chloroform, or alcohol she could not say. It was as if the life was ebbing out of her brain.

She was lying face down on the cot. His hands were pushing away the hair at the nape of her neck. His fingers touched her skull here and there, lightly, rapidly. Lightly and madly, they seemed to be dancing all over the back of her skull. Incredibly, they reminded Susan of birds, frantically, blindly, trying to escape—fluttering here and there, in terror pecking away at whatever it was that obstructed their escape.

"It will hurt for only a moment, Susan."

A woman's clear, cool voice intruded. "Oh, this has gone quite far enough! Drop that knife, Luigi."

Susan felt the mad, dancing fingers leave her skull. She commanded herself to move, to sit up. It took all the nervous force she possessed to execute this desire. Fighting down that mental fog.

Ordering her crumpled will to stand by her. Compelling her listless muscles to coördinate. With awful

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tremblings, she did at last accomplish what she wanted; she turned on her side, dropped her feet to the floor, pushed herself to a sitting position.

Karen was standing above them, a German automatic pistol, a Lüger, in one hand.

It had a long barrel, and the muzzle of it was within a foot of the doctor's heart.

"Put that knife down or I will kill you, Luigi! If you raise your voice—if you make any attempt to call for help—I will shoot you. Drop that knife on the floor!"

Her husband dropped the scalpel. His breath, thick and heavy and somehow red with rage, seemed to gurgle out of that great barrel of a body. "How dare you interfere with me?" His dilating eyes roved from her face to the door. "Where is Avery?" he whispered hoarsely.

"Gone."

Susan, looking at her, felt suddenly cold. She shivered. Karen had worn riding clothes when she had last seen her. She now wore a fantastic thing of vivid jade green—a kind of robe. It came high up on her neck and covered all the length of her arms, except the wrists.

It was the brightest, most intense green Susan had ever seen. It had a life of its own, independent of the woman who wore it. It seemed vibrant. This was an intangible quality, an *essence* quite apart from the material or the amazing intense color. It lent Karen Strang an air of barbaric mystery, of absolute unreality. Taken with it, her hair might truly have been of carved gold, her white face a mask of platinum—or metallic porcelain.

The carved green jade quarter-moons hanging from her ear lobes, and the string of carved green jade amulets at her throat, were the ornaments of a mythological goddess.

SUSAN was suddenly much more afraid of her than she had ever been of Dr. Strang. Even the jade lady's eyes were a glittering metal. She was not a woman of flesh and bones and blood, but a creature compounded of rare metals, in which the breath, the beat, the spark of life magically resided. She had become the essence of all things sinister and unknown.

Dr. Strang's dilating eyes had leaped from the empty doorway to his wife's face. They grew more and more brilliant. The doctor's breath was no longer produced in heavy wheezes, but in silent, quick little puffs. His face had gone slack, flaccid. It was suddenly white, and oily. His lips were no longer red, but colorlessly dark—a nameless, leaden blue. His great bulk was trembling. It was as if he had been suddenly devastated by a glimpse of a stark, hideous fatality.

"You are an agent of Mr. Lu!" he whispered.

"Yes."

"You saved this girl from my knife only because you had orders to deliver her to him!"

"Yes."

A lower whisper, as venomous as the hissing of a cobra, "You devil! You horrible woman!—You vulture! You vampire!"

"I warn you, Luigi," the jade lady said, "that I will kill you if you make any attempt to summon help."

Dr. Strang was softly, desperately, beating his temples with his clenched fists, as if he was trying to arouse some masterly thought that would cope with this incomprehensible surprise.

"You and this girl are to come with me," the jade lady said. "Three horses

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are outside. You are to ride the black. You, Susan, will ride the gray. I ride the white. You will mount your horses and go where I direct you. Susan will lead, and you will follow. I shall ride last. Come."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CHARCOAL PAGODA.

PETER MOORE was looking out the window of his shack when that savage and mystifying attack began. The power house stood out white and sharp in the light of the soaring moon. It was like a fortress, except that it lacked the great, forbidding bulk of a fortress.

It was, in another sense, a monument—the kind of monument that explorers build to mark their farthest advance. Certainly, in the engineer's mind, even at this pessimistic moment, it did not stand for death. Long after his death, it would be doing its work. His great regret was that he would not be here to-morrow when it would begin the fulfillment of its destiny. There was something clean and fine about this power house. He was proud of it; proud, too, of the slim wires strung to those rugged steel masts which would carry sixty thousand volts over hundreds of miles of hills and rivers and deserts. To him, all this was the essence of romance, the stuff of fine dreams.

He was suddenly resentful that he would be unable to finish the project. He wanted to build the other plants; wanted to see the chain working as a synchronous unit. Susan would have been proud of that.

Damn Dr. Strang! No man had so successfully spoiled another man's plans, or ruined his aspirations, than had this black-eyed madman. Peter wondered what would happen to them in Mr. Lu's palace. What, he desolately wondered, would happen to Susan? The mad doctor had, with his fantastic scheme, completely smashed their lives.

Bill Montgomery, standing there beside him, was occupied with his own thoughts. Long ago, he had ceased to dramatize the situation. The emotions engendered by the imminence of inevitable death cannot be dramatized for any great length of time. The stark fact pushed in on him, numbed him.

Peter knew now that Bill was not afraid. It was simply that his brain was unable to cope with an inescapable doom.

Silently, the two men were looking out the window. It was at that moment that the hillsides all about them became alive with swarms of armed men. These hordes might have been bred from the dark pockets of shadow under the bowlders. They sprang into being as the warriors of the fable sprang, full girt, from the ground where dragons' teeth had been sown. They came in surging waves from the East.

They were barefoot, which meant to Peter that they were river men. Doubtless they had come up this tributary from the Yangtze, in sampans. Leaving their boats downstream, they had slipped from shadow to shadow with the stealth and quiet of ghosts.—But all these stealthy, swarming men wore blue capes over their heads, small capes faintly resembling the burnooses which roving desert tribes of the north wear as protection against the blinding sandstorms!

THEY attacked the bivouacked forces which Dr. Strang had left to guard Moore and Montgomery with a swiftness, a deadliness that was appalling. It was as if the hillsides

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had suddenly burst into flame. The rippling red-blue of rifle fire occurred simultaneously, as if it was timed to a split second. From every quarter it sent up an explosive roar as tremendous, as deafening, as the detonation caused by a mountain rent in half by an earthquake.

There was no doubt in Peter Moore's mind that these attacking hordes were Mr. Lu's men. Their concerted deadliness of attack alone meant that. And there was significance in the blue color of their capes.

Peter seized Bill Montgomery by the shoulders, and with a jerk, pulled him down to the floor. Above the rattling explosions, he shouted, "Safer down here! Chances are, though, they have orders not to harm us."

The man beside him on the dirt floor cried, "I'd rather go out there and take my chances!"

"You wouldn't live ten feet."

"But what chance have we, if they're Lu's men?"

"We've had luck so far."

Bill roared an answer, but Peter was unable to distinguish what it was. Dr. Strang's surprised warriors were now springing to arms. The sharp nitric odor of burned smokeless powder began to seep into the shack. The air shook with the volleys of rifle fire. The ground trembled under the pounding feet of running men. A bullet, perhaps a ricochet, screamed through the roof of the shack. Another shattered the window.

It seemed to Peter that the firing was moving away and upward—toward the top of the dam. Feet were running in that direction. Beyond the flimsy wall he heard a man scream in agony. The scream subsided to a gurgling moan.

The firing drew off. Peter's guess was that Dr. Strang's mercenaries were trying to retreat over the dam, and that Lu's warriors were following, ruthlessly slaughtering them.

"Can you hear me now?" Bill Montgomery shouted.

"Yes!"

"I said, if Lu's men have orders not to harm us, what's to prevent us from fighting our way through them?"

"We can try," Peter said. "Come on!"

He got up and opened the door of the shack. Thin vapors hung in the moonlight — all but invisible gases. Dead and dying men were strewn all over the camp. A hundred men in blue capes were rolling these victims to the rim of the low cliff that overhung the river—cleaning up—leaving no traces. That was like Mr. Lu.

"We'll cut back over the hill behind the power house," Peter said. "Run!"

They ran down the path toward the power house. One of the blue-hooded men raised a rifle. Suddenly he pushed it down. Bill Montgomery, aiming as he ran, fired at him. The Chinese sprawled and limply rolled over on his back.

Then the hooded men of Mr. Lu came swarming from every side. The two Americans emptied their guns, then used them as clubs. They fought literally back to back. The ring of hooded men about them pressed closer and closer. Peter lifted his revolver and brought it down on a head. The head vanished. But now he could not lift his hand at all. He and Bill Montgomery were packed in so tightly that they could not move.

PETER'S guess that they would not be harmed proved to be a correct one. They were not harmed. They were not touched by a single hand. They were simply rendered powerless

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by the pressure of that deep, silent human circle. The men closed in upon the two Americans more and more tightly, as the iris of an eye closes to diminish the brilliance of light; and presently they were unable to move a hand or a leg, could scarcely breath.

The man from Montana was panting and cursing. What he would do to these yellow devils if he could only move his hands! It was the colorful, sulphurous language of the cowboy at bay — blasphemies which he had learned at roundups, on night herd, when the human spirit is so sorely tried by brute stubbornness and folly.

But he soon lost heart. He gasped, "Pete, what the hell are these coyotes going to do to us?"

"I wish I knew."

The immediate intentions of the "coyotes" was, however, promptly evidenced. Sacks of tough blue cloth were bound down about the Americans' heads; their hands were lashed behind their backs. The cattle prince's profanity, his dire threats, now came muffled, though no less valiant. He was—by this and by that!—going to even matters up! It might take long, because it was an ambitious program, reducing all this yellow humanity to so much pulp! Nevertheless they'd see, some day!

Peter's desires were somewhat less ambitious. All he wanted was to get Bill, Susan and himself out of this deadly situation somehow—to reach the haven of Shanghai or Pekin.

Hands touched them now, but these were the hands of guidance — always there, instantly ready, in case either of the white men stumbled. They were taken up the path to the dam. They were led across the dam. A thin, cold, mountain wind filtered through the cloth bag and carried to Peter the smell of fresh blood. But the firing had ceased. He supposed that Lu's men had finished their mopping up. He wondered if any of Dr. Strang's mercenaries had survived. He doubted it.

Once across the dam, he lost all sense of location. They were being taken down the side of the hill, but as this hill was domelike, it was hard to guess in which direction they were going.

Presently he heard the nervous chatter of horses' hoofs on the stones. Hands lifted him into a saddle and placed his feet into bone stirrups.

He called to Bill, and the man from Montana answered, "Any idea where this outfit's taking us?"

Peter didn't know. The horsemen started. There must have been a hundred of them. They rode along at a brisk trot, slowing only for steep descents, or where the going was exceptionally rough. The wind seemed to be striking Peter mostly on the right side. He knew the prevailing winds in this section of the country were from the north, and so he assumed their course of travel to be westerly. Yet he had no clear idea of the direction, and he presently lost all sense of time.

THAT swift ride across the hills might have consumed fifty minutes or several hours. He was too preoccupied with trying to stay in the saddle to think of much else. His horse was sharp-gaited and nervous, but a man rode on either side of Peter for the purpose of keeping him in his saddle. They talked briefly. He gathered that they were late for some appointment, and that they must make better time. He learned that all of Lu's men had withdrawn from the vicinity of the power plant; that half of them were following the horsemen afoot, the other half returning to the sampans a few miles down the river.

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The two Chinese who rode, one on either side of him, were evidently the leaders of this expedition. He presumed that he was being taken to wherever Susan was, and that he and she were to be placed under a strong guard. They would—presumably—be taken together to the sampan fleet, which would proceed down the river to the Yangtze, and up the Yangtze to its most westerly navigable point. From there, they would proceed by horseback to the Lake of the Flying Dragon.

This seemed logical enough. But what was to become of Bill Montgomery? Was he to be taken to that fabulous palace, too? Had Dr. Strang and Professor Van Zant also been captured?

Peter was suddenly conscious of a damp chill in the air. It was different from the dry air through which they had been trotting, and he supposed that they were down amongst trees, in some deep ravine.

The cavalcade stopped. Peter was lifted down from his horse. The hood was snatched from his head, and he found himself standing beside Bill Montgomery, in the apex of an angle which was formed by lines of blue-hooded men. It was a human wedge-shaped group of men, with the two Americans facing the open end at the top.

All about them were the aspiring, melancholy forms of cedar trees, the drooping branches of which looked wet and black in the moonlight that filtered through them. Just ahead, rising into the night, was a tall, familiar structure—a pagoda. It was black as India ink, except where the moonlight silvered the projections of its narrow upper stories.

The man from Montana gasped, "What place is this?"

"It's called the Charcoal Pagoda," Peter answered. And added with grim humor, "It's supposed to be haunted by a white dragon forty feet long, that breathes live steam and lights its way with fire-green eyes."

As he concluded that fable, a glow of light appeared in the doorway of the Charcoal Pagoda. In color it was a dazzling, sapphire blue. Coming from a source within the pagoda, it laid a path of sapphire blue light across the ground to the feet of the two Americans. Mist or vapors coiled and swam about in the shaft of dazzling blue; and the chill sweat of fear broke out on Peter's forehead. Only once before had he seen that particular vivid sapphire light. It had blazed at the end of a triangular room, in the cave of the Blue Scorpion!

CHAPTER XVII.

BEFORE THE THRONE.

THE two lines of Chinese closed behind Peter Moore and Bill Montgomery. Gently but insistently, they were urged toward the door of the pagoda.

Bill Montgomery said quietly, "Something tells me that we are never going to walk out of that place alive. If we don't—so long!"

A man behind them slashed the bindings at their hands. And Bill said, "My hands are numb. But—shall we try to make a break for it?"

Peter shook his head. "No use. I'll do my best to get you out of this."

"Do you know what it means?"

"I think so. I think we're all keeping an appointment with Mr. Lu."

"Not here!" Bill said.

"We'll soon know."

Their voices were the only sounds, except for the faint sighing of the wind in the melancholy cedars. No sound

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came from the pagoda. The men all about them were so silent that they seemed not even to be breathing.

The blazing sapphire light, now shining in their eyes, prevented them from seeing the man lying at the foot of the pagoda steps until they were almost upon him. The man was dead. It was Professor Van Zant, and his throat had been slit. His head lay in a pool of blood, and blood still trickled from the slash.

For the first time, Bill Montgomery's courage seemed to falter. He grasped his companion's arm and whispered, "Is this what's going to happen to us?" The hand on Peter's arm was trembling a little.

"Steady, Bill!"

The cattle prince lifted his head, lifted his chest. The blue light on his face was ghastly. "I'm not afraid!"

"No," Peter said. "You've done nothing to worry about."

Slowly, with elbows touching, the two men walked up the steps. And behind them the lines of men closed in at the foot of the steps. It all reminded Peter, as they approached the doorway of that pagan temple, of a death march; one-two, one-two, one-two. No sound other than the soft thumping of their feet on stone. The sapphire light glaring on their faces made everything grotesque. It gave to everything it touched a stark, macabre quality.

Suddenly it impressed Peter Moore as a scene from some night thousands of years ago. He and this other man were entering a temple of dark and awful mystery—two human sacrifices to some dark and awful god. They had displeased this god, and he was about to visit his wrath upon them.

The sapphire light filled a large and lofty room with walls of blistered black. There were no windows. At the far end was a latticed door, beyond which was darkness. The sapphire light was an affair of brass shell, suspended from the center of the ceiling by fine brass chains which seemed to be blue incandescent wires. Vapors rose swirling from the heart of the sapphire glare.

BUT Peter noticed these details only incidentally, for he had seen Susan, lying in a crumpled heap beneath the brass shell. He heard Bill Montgomery utter a grunt of horror, but paid no heed to him.

Susan was lying on her side, with her head pillowed on her arm. Fearfully, he touched her face, her neck. She was warm. At his touch, she stirred. Her eyes partially opened and stared at him dazedly. They opened wider.

She cried, "Peter!—Oh, darling!" And struggled up. She folded both arms fiercely about his neck, then held him off and stared at his face. When he had lifted her to her feet, she gasped, "You look so dreadful in this light!"

So did Susan, for that matter; she looked ghastly. But she was unharmed. She was suddenly aware of Bill Montgomery, although he was no longer aware of her. His profile was presented to her, and he was staring with open mouth, as if his breathing had been suspended.

Peter followed the direction of Bill's gaze, and was suddenly spellbound.

Clinging to him, Susan whispered, "It's Karen Strang!"

Against that wall, on a pagan altar of carved ebony, sat the jade lady. Like a priestess of some ancient, mystic cult, she sat with chin erect, with hands crossed in her lap. From a brazier on either side of her, white

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smoke mounted to the ceiling in thin quills. On either side of the bench stood an ebony post, perhaps four feet in height. Similar posts were fixed in the floor at the foot of the steps. From each of the posts beside the bench to each of the posts at the foot of the steps ran a heavy bronze chain. The individual links must have been two inches in diameter. But there was no chain between the posts at the bottom of the steps, to guard the jade lady against approach.

Peter did not know that her gown was of vivid green, because its color seemed to come from the sapphire light above. But even in the blue light her hair was metallically golden and her face was like porcelain. He sensed, as he stared at her, the same thing that Susan had sensed; this woman was hardly human, but rather a creation of metals or ceramics, magically invested with the breath and throb of life.

She was a sinister idol, at whose feet a thousand barbarians might devoutly have knelt. She was a goddess of all the black arts. She was an incarnation of the mystery of all that mortal man would never know. Though a white woman, she was a symbol of all that was cryptic in the deathless lore of Asia.

Yet Peter Moore, sensing all this, tried to deny the feeling that all of this was—must be—occurring on a night thousands of years ago. He logically informed himself that she, like the blue light and like the black pagoda, was but one more manifestation of Mr. Lu's incredible whimsicality.

A FAINT, eery sighing from the darkened room beyond the latticed door distracted Peter momentarily from the jade priestess, but his quick glance discovered nothing.

Trying to order his senses, trying to compel himself to accept this weird scene calmly, he became aware that the glittering eyes of the jade lady were focused on Bill Montgomery.

He glanced at Bill. The man from Montana still stared, as if he was actually under hypnosis. His jaw was ajar; his breathing was seemingly suspended. He could see only the woman enthroned on the carved ebony altar.

The lips of the jade lady moved. The faintest of whispers — hardly more than the rustling ghost of a sound—came from her.

"Here."

That was all. Only the single, simple imperative. And it was addressed, singularly, to the cattle prince. She touched the bench beside her.

This, Peter told himself, was absolutely incredible. Why did that shocking creature wish Bill Montgomery to sit beside her? She was certainly an agent, a tool, perhaps a slave of Mr. Lu's. Call her what one would, she was obedient to the schemes of the Blue Scorpion. Was that why she wished Bill Montgomery to sit beside her?—To witness what?

Chilling possibilities occurred to Peter Moore in answer to the last question. Was it the destruction, in some horribly ingenious Oriental way, of himself and Susan?

He remembered something that had previously seemed of slight importance. That metallic creature, Susan had once mentioned, was in love with Bill Montgomery. Therefore—Oh—preposterous! Peter said grimly to himself, "Not mixing love with work—not that woman!"

She had married Dr. Strang at Mr. Lu's bidding, so that she could make infinitely thorough reports on the mad project of that brilliant, twisted intel-

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lect. And in this, again, Peter saw the workings of a mind too Oriental, too devious for him to comprehend. And Peter understood the Oriental mind rather well, too.

If Dr. Strang had seemed to threaten the Blue Scorpion's supremacy, why had the powerful Mr. Lu not simply had him shot or stabbed? The Jade Brain could sometimes work with the stabbing directness of a lightning bolt, and it could also be as circuitous as the beclouded attack of an octopus. What had—or would be—the doctor's fate?

Peter asked Susan what had become of Dr. Strang. She did not know. He had vanished. Susan hardly heard him, for she was engrossed by the jade lady.

Bill Montgomery was walking slowly forward, like a man gripped by some absorbing preoccupation, toward the waiting woman. He gave a little shrug, as if to say, "Well, who cares? What does it matter?"

He proceeded to the ebony altar and slowly mounted the six broad steps which led to the little platform on which the bench was placed. He turned about and seated himself beside Karen. Her head slowly turned, the blue light glinting in her golden cap of hair. She studied his puffed, bruised face for perhaps half a minute.

Folding his arms on his chest, sitting as erectly as if he were a king, the cattle prince ignored her. There was a faint grin upon his swollen lips. It occurred to Peter that that lion-hearted young man might very possibly be enjoying himself, as if he had automatically slipped into a rôle in what he had decided must be *opéra bouffe*—whimsical Oriental farce, laid in a pagoda that was a relic of a forgotten Chinese epoch, staged by what was perhaps the most imaginative, most sinister figure that China had ever produced! Or was he merely prepared with that plucky grin on his swollen lips to meet whatever fate had in store for him?

Certainly, preparations for whatever was about to happen must now be complete.

Susan, with one arm tightly about Peter's waist, was shivering, making little whimpering sounds.

"I did all this," she said. "If I hadn't let Dr. Strang bully me into betraying you, this would not have happened."

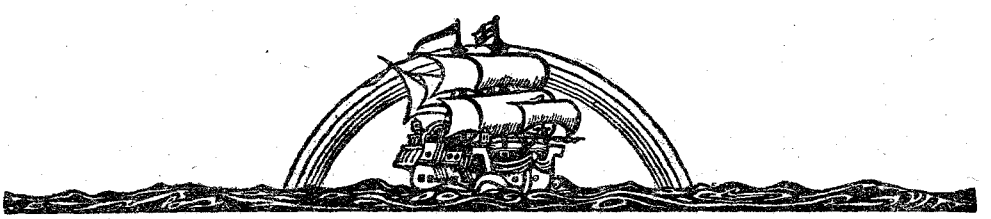
As Peter started to reassure her, a voice anticipated him.

"Yes," it said. "You did all this!"

A soft, thin, whispering voice it was, so cold that it sent fresh shudders through Susan.

Peter had spun half about, to face the latticed door. He knew now, quite definitely, that their host was present; that the man whom all Asia called the Blue Scorpion was in that darkened anteroom!

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.



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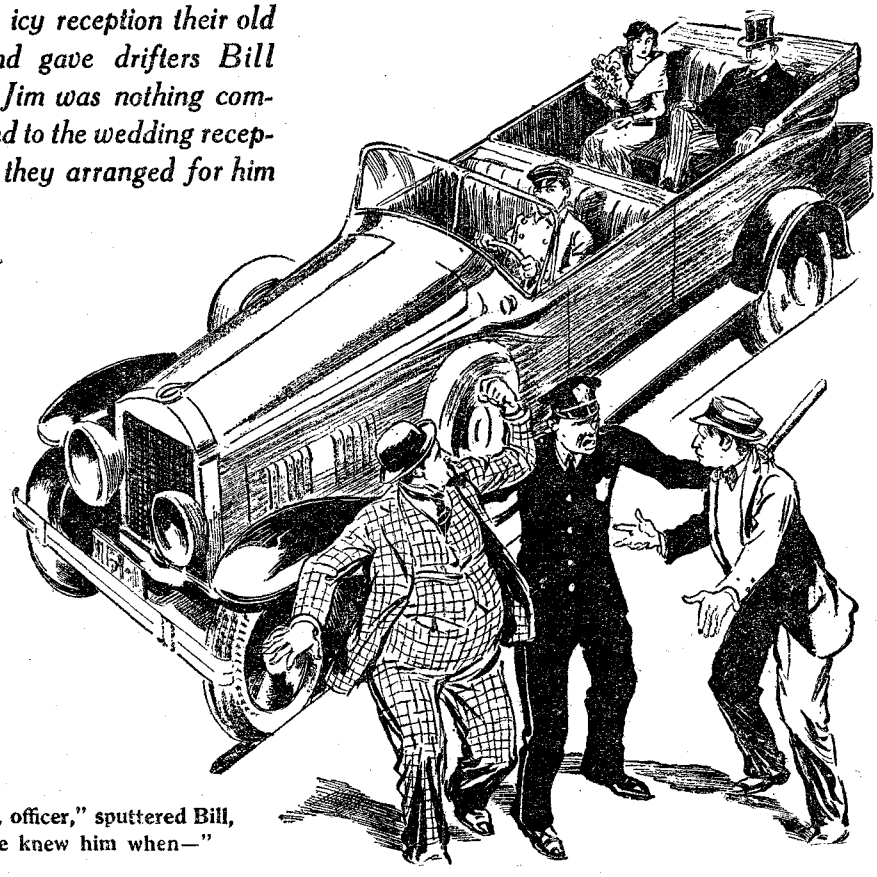
Broken Wedding Bells

By JOHN H. THOMPSON

The icy reception their old friend gave drifters Bill and Jim was nothing compared to the wedding reception they arranged for him



"But, officer," sputtered Bill, "we knew him when—"

THE frock-coated individual was Gus Simpson, one-time handy man in the Beary Carnival, but his silk-gowned companion was something else again — something in the line of a perambulating iceberg. She looked at Bill as though he was the squashed remains of a skunk which had attempted to cross a main highway on a Sunday afternoon at the height of the touring season.

"Don't you remember your old pals, Gus?" pleaded Bill.

"Who are these presumptuous, disreputable looking individuals, August?" demanded the iceberg severely. She glanced around, apparently in quest of somebody in uniform to scrape such scum as Bill and I from the earth.

"Really, my dear, I never saw the fellows before," said Gus, glaring angrily at us.

"But—"

Bill's expostulation was rudely cut short.

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"Here is the car, Marguerite." Gus shoved us aside, brushed his gloved hands together to free them of any germs which they might have picked up by his coming in contact with us, and beckoned peremptorily to the uniformed chauffeur at the wheel of a big lavender car which was gliding toward the curb.

"Can you beat that?" demanded Bill, quivering with indignation as Gus assisted the iceberg into the car and followed after her with another angry glare in our direction. "The last time we saw that guy was when he borrowed the fifty cents from us to buy the winning ticket in the Spanish lottery. Now look at him. Putting on more airs than a Park Avenue lap dog. Ashamed of his old carnival pals, ashamed of the guys who used to stake him to breakfasts when he was broke. 'August!' Can you beat that? Wearing a silk hat, too, with shiny stuff along the edges of his coat lapels and a baby blue flower in his buttonhole. I'll bet the poor prune even had spats on. Holy mackerel! And he used to steal pennies from the crippled fortune teller. He—" Bill was seething with indignation.

"Hey, you big stiff!" he shouted, directing his attention to the lavender car. "Where's that half dollar you borrowed from us? Where—"

Gus was doing his best not to look flustered. The iceberg was burning us up with a glare strained through a set of eye-glasses on a stick.

"Go ahead, James," she ordered.

But Gus spotted a policeman across the street and countermanded the order.

"Officer," he called.

The officer strode across the street.

"I want these two dirty bums arrested," demanded Gus. "There's too much of this cheap riffraff on the streets insulting respectable people. Here is my card. My attorney will appear in court to press the complaint."

"Holy mackerel! Gus, you don't mean—you ain't having two of your old—"

Bill's expostulation was rudely interrupted, however.

"Do your duty, officer," directed Gus curtly. His eyes evaded ours. "Home, James," he snapped to the chauffeur, and the lavender car purred away.

"Come on, you two bums," ordered the officer.

"But, officer," sputtered Bill, "we knew him when—"

"Shut up!" snapped the officer angrily. "I don't want none of your gab."

The command was more or less superfluous, though, because Bill was practically speechless anyway.

FIVE minutes later we were standing before the lieutenant at headquarters.

"Coupla bums—insulted Lord Titterham and his fiancée," said the officer. "They—" He paused as the lieutenant turned to answer the telephone. We heard one side of the conversation.

"Oh, yes, Lord Titterham, this is Lieutenant Miller speaking at headquarters. Yes—" A pause. "Yes, certainly—" Another pause. The lieutenant evidently was having a hard time to get in a word edgewise, and policemen hate to be interrupted. "Of course, but we can't send them up for six months without some kind of—" Another pause. "I'm not insulting anybody. Yes, I know you are marrying Morgan Lewis's daughter. I—" This time there was a long pause, dur-

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ing which the lieutenant's face crimsoned with anger. "But I'm trying to tell you—" We could hear the click of a receiver being banged up at the other end.

"Hello! Hello!" The lieutenant jiggled his receiver hook and then angrily banged it down.

"These two bums," continued the patrolman, taking up his story at the point where it had been interrupted by the telephone, "insulted Lord Titterham by speaking to him on the street."

"Is that all they did—spoke to him on the street?" demanded the lieutenant. His face was beginning to return to its normal color.

"Yeah, but it was Lord Titterham," said the officer as though that explained everything, which perhaps it did. "These bums—"

"We're not bums, and we didn't insult nobody," protested Bill indignantly.

The officer flashed an angry look at us.

"You—"

"That's all right, Clancy," interrupted the lieutenant curtly. He rubbed his chin reflectively. "An' so his lordship says to me, 'Too bad there isn't a more intelligent element on the police force to take orders from their betters,' that's what he says. Hmph!" The lieutenant realized suddenly that he had spoken his reflections aloud. "You can go, Clancy," he directed. "I'll attend to this case myself."

The officer glared resentfully at us, jammed on his hat and departed.

The lieutenant looked down at us severely.

"Did you insult Lord Titterham?" he asked.

"No," Bill and I chorused.

The lieutenant seemed a bit disappointed. It was obvious that so far as he was concerned, he wouldn't have been broken-hearted over any insults hurled at Lord Titterham.

"Well, I'm going to let you two go," said the lieutenant. "We haven't got any case against you. Beat it."

Bill tarried, however. The lieutenant's good-natured grin had encouraged him to seek some information we were craving.

"Who in thunder is this bird who claims to be Lord Titterham?" he asked.

The lieutenant chuckled sociably. "There's been enough guff about him in the papers. He's a rich snob from over across, and he's going to marry Marguerite Lewis, daughter of old Morgan Lewis, our local big shot. It was a whirlwind courtship. He hit town Monday and the wedding's to be this afternoon."

"With a big splurge, probably?" ventured Bill.

The lieutenant snorted derisively. "Lord Titterham wouldn't stand for a big wedding. I guess he was afraid some common ordinary everyday folks might stray into the church during the ceremony and pollute him by their presence. They are going to be married in the mayor's office at two o'clock this afternoon by the mayor himself."

The telephone jingled again and we took advantage of the interruption to ease ourselves out of headquarters.

"LORD TITTERHAM!" Bill might have laughed if he hadn't been so dog-goned mad. "The nervy, four-flushing impostor! Bums, he called us, and we used to share our chow with him, lend him money when he was broke, and overlook his crooked stuff—then he wants us sent up for six months just because

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we had the mistaken idea that he was still a sort of an apology for a human being and tried to say hello to him."

Bill suddenly started striding along so fast that it was all I could do to keep up with him.

"Why the sudden rush?" I protested. "We're in no hurry to get anywhere."

"Oh, yes, we are," retorted Bill. "We're going over to the carnival grounds. D'you think I'm going to let our old friend"—he gritted his teeth as he said the last two words—"get married without all the boys from the lot being on hand to give him a send-off? Just think how much Gus would appreciate a lively send-off from the boys."

The bare thought of Gus's appreciation made me grin.

"It's too bad, of course, that they won't have time to dress up at all," chuckled Bill. "But they can go as they are. Gus will appreciate it just the same."

"Even more," I agreed.

"We'll give him a little gift, too," said Bill. "We'll have Larry do up the overalls that Gus discarded when he stole the cashier's suit and skipped out with his lottery winnings. It'll make a bully present for a guy who is selling off a bogus title to the tune of 'I Love Thee Truly.' Maybe Gus will be so pleased that he'll blow all the boys to a wedding dinner."

"Maybe—it would be just like him," I agreed.

"I'll mention that to the boys," chuckled Bill. "All they'll have to do will be to greet him as 'Gus,' 'old pal,' and the like o' that—we'll have to make that clear to them. Most of the boys who remember him wouldn't want to speak to him, but if there's a chance of a free feed, they'll all coöperate to the limit. Some of the guys over on the park benches might like to join the party, too. The more the merrier. All we have to do is to give the passwords and mention the possibility of a free dinner. Nobody loves a four-flushing snob, but everybody loves a feed."

Like most kind hearted, easy going men, Bill is hard to rouse, but once roused he's like a two-year-old kid whose mud pie has been trampled under foot.

PROMPTLY at five minutes to two, the crowd was waiting in front of the city hall for the lavender car to roll up. It was a motley, shabby crew, most of them not knowing what was going on except that some dinner-distributing philanthropist was going to hand out meal tickets to everybody who clapped him on the back and shouted "Hello, Gus." The only thing that worried me was what would happen when the meal tickets failed to materialize, but that didn't seem to worry Bill at all.

"Let's get inside the lobby and make it a surprise party," suggested a shabby recruit who had been picked up in the park. "Maybe Lord Bountiful will toss in some breakfasts on top of the dinners," he added optimistically.

We piled into the lobby and almost swept from his feet a pompous looking, white-haired, high hatted individual who was standing there with a gold watch in his hand.

"Here, here, you fellows, what does this mean?" demanded the high hatted one indignantly.

"Holy mackerel, I bet it's the mayor," groaned Bill in dismay. He quickly recovered his composure, however. "An old-time carnival pal is being married," he explained, "and all the boys have come over from the lot

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to give him a push down the matrimonial toboggan."

The high hatted one looked provoked, but sighed in resignation.

"Well, don't block up the doorway," he muttered impatiently. "There's another wedding on this afternoon—an important one. You fellows will have to stand outside."

We meekly filed out of the building and arrived on the sidewalk just as the lavender car rolled up to the curb.

"There he is, boys," shouted Bill gleefully.

The welcoming committee promptly swung into action.

"Hey, Gus," shouted one stentorian voiced carnival roustabout who had a weather eye on a six-course dinner. "Dear old Gus. I haven't seen you since you were ballyhooing for the hoochy-coochy show."

"Hooray for Gus, a rotten carnival man, but a dog-gonned swell looking bridegroom," shouted another enthusiast.

"What does this mean, August?" demanded a cold, steely voice. "Do you know these persons?"

Gus, standing with one foot on the running board, gulped and stammered.

"This bunch of dirty bums," he sneered finally. "I never saw one of them before." And as he said it he was gazing directly into the eye of the cashier from whom he had stolen the suit.

"Come on, boys, three rousing cheers and a tiger for the guy who won the Spanish lottery and is going to tie up with a millionaire," proposed the stentorian voiced roustabout.

The iceberg was glaring suspiciously at the flustered phony lord, but he didn't notice the glare. He was gazing horror-stricken toward the edges of the welcoming crowd.

Then, without a word he plunged forward and tore down the street, coat tails flying.

"Ugh!" a snort of disgust, followed by the slamming of a door—and the lavender car purred away with the iceberg sitting in lonely grandeur in the back. I caught a passing glimpse of her face. She wasn't looking so upstage just then.

The crowd gazed in astonished dismay at the disappearing car and then at the corner in the opposite direction around which the fleeing Gus had sped.

A RUMBLE of indignation arose. It was directed at Bill, the recognized leader of the pilgrimage which was to have led to the feed trough.

"We want our dinners." The chorus was menacing.

"You—" Bill started to say something, but it trailed off into a groan of dismay. He pointed helplessly down the street. A blue-coated figure was coming hot-footed. And even in my agitation I recognized him. It was Officer Clancy!

"What's the trouble here?" he demanded angrily as he approached the crowd.

"This guy promised us we'd all have free dinners if we came down here to join in a send-off to a fake lord who was going to marry an heiress, but just because we were here it broke up the wedding," explained one of the hungry and disappointed roustabouts. He pointed accusingly at Bill. "There's the guy that promised us dinners."

The officer took one look at Bill.

"So, you've been drinking again and raising another muss, eh?" he said grimly. "Well, you won't get off so easily this time." He pulled out a pair of handcuffs.

"Just a minute, officer." Somebody

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pushed his way in from the edge of the crowd where Gus had got the eyeful that caused him to run. It was the high hatted individual who had been in the lobby of the city hall.

Clancy respectfully touched his cap.

"The trouble as I understand it seems to be that this man here," the high hatted individual pointed to Bill, "promised dinners to these fellows if they joined in a little wedding party, but that the four-flushing bounder who was to be the bridegroom spoiled the party by running away."

"I guess that's it," said Clancy, fingering his handcuffs impatiently.

"That being the case, I'll see that the promise is made good. Boys, all of you line up over at that restaurant across the street. The dinners are on me."

Clancy gaped in chagrined astonishment, then turned away.

"D'you hear that, fellows?" exclaimed Bill gleefully. "The mayor himself is going to blow us to dinners."

"Not the mayor," corrected the high hatted individual. "I am Morgan Lewis."

THE END.

$500 for a Stomach Ache

IN many parts of the United States when a person falls ill, the family doctor called to attend the patient is a medicine man.

Such is the case among the Navajo Indians of Arizona and New Mexico. In 1930, one of the wealthiest Navajos, Hosteen Endischi, living in the northwest corner of the Navajo Reserve held an *entah* or healing ceremony to cure Pardon, his favorite second wife, of a bad case of indigestion. Normally she could have been relieved by a little bicarbonate of soda—but it cost Old Endischi the round sum of $500 in money, food and sheep, as well as other gifts to the medicine man, singers and mud dancers.

This ceremony lasted three days. A special hut was built, a "new" scalp of an enemy procured (in this case the scalp was taken from the grave of a very defunct Hopi), the disease was transferred to the scalp and the scalp was quite literally killed by a shot from a .38 Winchester rifle.

The mud dance was a special feature on the third day, and for two hours a band of young Navajos, stripped to breech clouts, moccasins and head bands, raced madly about the landscape seizing victims and hurling them, clothes and all, into a specially prepared mud bath.

This was supposed to be especially beneficial. Victims once captured could buy off with cigarettes or money, or if they gained sanctuary in a hut or summer shelter, they could not be dragged out.

Men who fell down during the chase were given a special medicine treatment after the dance. A cream-colored horse used during the excitement was also treated for minor injuries in the same manner as the human patients.

All in all it was quite a gala affair. During the serious part of the ceremony, every one was quite solemn, but the mud dance was the vaudeville show. The affair cost $500, but no one seemed to know whether the patient was cured or not.

Arthur Woodward.

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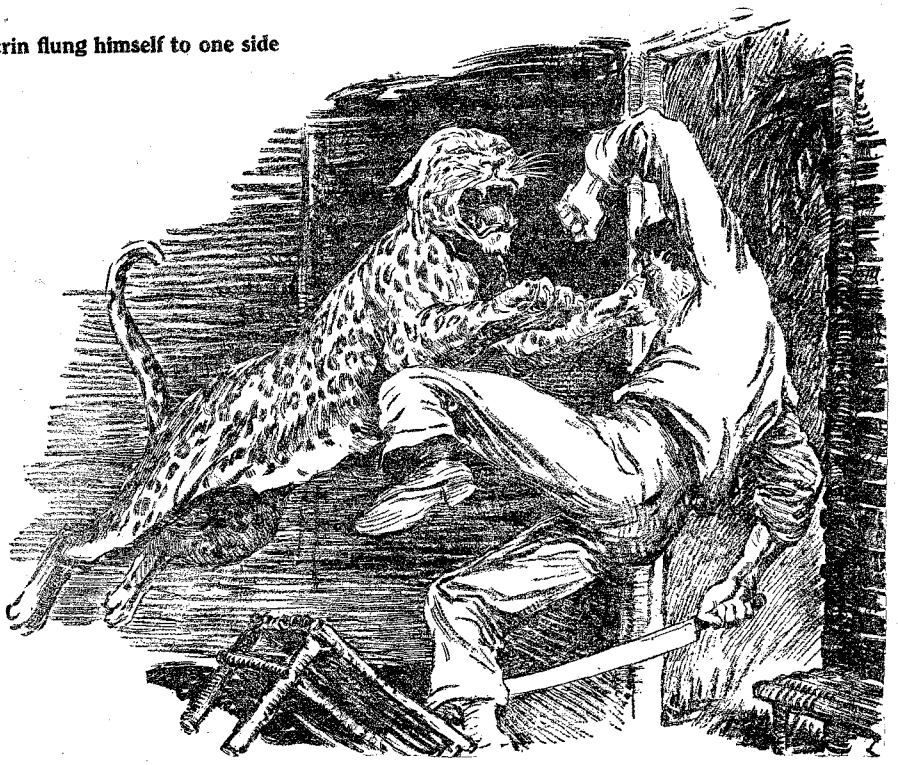
Ducrin flung himself to one side



The Silence

By ROBERT CARSE

Escape from the French Guiana penal colony was only the first step for Ducrin—the jungle lay ahead

DUCRIN had no difficulty in escaping. It was really very simple. The convict wood-cutting gang of which he was a member was working in the edge of the bush near St. Jean, which is south of St. Laurent-du-Maroni, in the French colony of Guiana.

There were over twenty convicts in that gang; all of them, with the exception of Ducrin, dispirited and slow-thinking men. They were guarded and kept desultorily at their work by two half-breed Tonkinese *surveillants*. The guards' habit was that one of the pair should keep watch over the gang while the other sat away from the sun and flies on the edge of the wood cutting and slept; to either of them it was wholly preposterous that one of the convicts should walk off into the jungle alone, unarmed and unsupplied.

It was just this that Ducrin did. And just because of that, his escape was successful and unmarked until the two Tonkinese counted heads for the night's march back to St. Jean. Then it was too late; Ducrin was well away in the bush, possibly already across the Maroni River and in Dutch territory on the other side.

His fate, argued the Tonkinese guards

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out of their knowledge of such rare one-man escapes, would be one of three things: unsupplied and unarmed as he was, he would die in the bush on this side of the river; if he got across the Maroni, he would soon be captured by the efficient Dutch colonial police, who would tonight receive the French alarm and a description of him; if he managed to fashion a raft and get on up the river, the bush-negro rivermen who lived along its banks would turn him in for the small head-premium offered by the French government, after robbing him of whatever money he had been able to collect and hide upon his body. It was more than foolish, such an attempt; it was mad . . .

Ducrin's hopes for his future were, of course, quite opposite. He had been pondering his escape for a long time. When the moment arrived, he achieved it with very little emotion and a great deal of confidence. He had slowly worked throughout the afternoon so that he should be the man farthest to the south and the man closest to the real virgin bush. Then, methodically keeping up his machete blows at a small tree he had felled, he waited until the one guard in watch over the gang had turned his back to talk to one of the convict workers at the other end of the cutting.

In that moment Ducrin disappeared. He jumped over the log he had been working upon, he parted the almost impenetrable curtain of leaves, lianas and tangled branches which formed the jungle wall on the other side, and was at once hidden within that green, dark thickness. There he shortly paused, listening. From behind came no cries and shouts. No one, then, had seen him go. Crouched down so that he was almost upon his knees and thus avoided the main mass of the obstructing lianas and branches, he kept on, maintaining a surprisingly good pace.

After five minutes of such work he knew that he was practically safe, and that nothing except a bush-negro tracker or bloodhounds could now find him. He paused and stood upright, pawing the leaves and bugs from his face and hair, considering the next step in his plan. The year before, while in one of the main penitentiary depots at St. Laurent, he had had the opportunity to talk with an old convict, a man who had finished his actual prison sentence and had been freed to spend the rest of his life within the boundaries of French Guiana.

A GREAT part of Ducrin's present plan of escape was due to the information given him by that man. The old convict, at the end of his prison term, had roamed the French bank of the Maroni, hunting butterflies and rubber, and only repeated doses of malaria had forced him to return to the coast and what scant livelihood he could find in the comparative civilization of St. Laurent.

For both Ducrin and himself, their meeting had been successful. Ducrin was already then bitten deeply by the one great convict desire of escape. The current and popular method of flight by somehow securing a boat, through months of dangerous dickering and the payment of a tremendous price, and then battling along the treacherous coast to Venezuela or Trinidad, did not appeal to Ducrin. He lacked the amount of money necessary, he disliked allying himself so closely with other convicts, and was aware that the chances of success were extremely small. This much he confided to the old convict.

In return, after being assured that Ducrin had some money, the other man confided the one plan he himself had worked out when young, desperate and still at forced labor in the terrible prisons. The sole reason for its failure, he now explained to Ducrin, had been that he was foolish enough to invite two other men to accompany him, one of whom had turned informer, thus securing the party's capture the moment it began the flight.

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But there was, he went hastily on, a hidden bayou of almost two miles in length up the Maroni, on the French side, and about twenty-five miles beyond St. Jean. This bayou was unknown, even to the Djuka rivermen, for it was masked from the regular course of the river by fallen trees, the driftwood of years of high water and the profuse jungle vegetation. There, a man or men could live secretly and well for months. There was fish of all sorts in the bayou, plentiful game in the jungle depths beyond, and rubber trees near its banks. He had since lived there himself for several weeks with another freed convict and brought back from it a couple of hundred francs' worth of balata, the crude rubber drippings. And then his only reason for coming out was that his partner had been bitten by a snake and died.

That man had not told Ducrin any more; there had been no need for him to do so. Ducrin could imagine the rest for himself. From here, where he now stood, to that bayou, unless the old convict had willfully and needlessly lied, was about two days' journey for him. Once arrived there, he would be reasonably safe for as long as he wished to stay. The period of his stay he could already pretty definitely gauge.

It was very probable that after six months his escape would be forgotten or his fate written down as death from fever, starvation, drowning or at the hands of the roaming and avaricious Djuka Negro rivermen. At the end of those six months, if he had been at all lucky and industrious, he would have fashioned a good dugout canoe and would possess a fair fortune in crude rubber, also a supply of smoked meat and fish, a powerful bow and plenty of arrows.

So equipped, he could strike up along the Maroni, turning down the next little jungle stream which branched off to the north, and thus out, probably entirely unquestioned and unnoticed, to the coast and to Paramaribo. There he could turn his balata into cash and try for a place on a ship leaving that port for Venezuela, Mexico or the United States.

Or, if he did not wish to take the chance of making his appearance in Paramaribo, he could quite readily and without arousing suspicion trade his balata for further supplies with some of the wandering Negro tribes in Dutch territory and continue on, through the vast maze of the jungle-stream network, and so to the Rio Orinoco in Venezuela, then down that stream to the busy, careless and free going city of Maracaibo.

THERE was now only one serious danger ahead of him. That was the fact that for six months he would be alone and utterly solitary by that jungle bayou. During that time he could not dare to show himself to any man, not even one of the bush Negroes, the majority of whom found a small but regular income in being informers for the French authorities.

But when the old convict had pointed that out to him in St. Laurent the year before, Ducrin had laughed at it. And standing here now in the lush green immensity of the jungle, he laughed at it again. His was a stoic, calm and strongly controlled nature. There were few if any nerves in his body. His physical equipment, as far as it was possible for him to do so, he had kept in excellent shape since that day three and a half years ago when he had landed in Guiana to begin his sentence.

It was true that he had never before lived in the complete jungle under any circumstances. But that he did not fear; in fact he looked forward to it with a sort of pleasurable curiosity. From the old convict, and during his year with the wood gang on the edge of the bush, he had learned a number of jungle tricks. He knew which tree barks would act as fever antidotes, which would give him poison for his blow darts and arrows, how to make fire, and how to make traps

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in which he would catch small game and fish. The rest, using his highly analytical and deductive mind, he could learn for himself. And to begin with, he had this strong and sharp-bladed machete, an almost invaluable tool and something of a weapon, which he now regarded, with no small humor, as his one but rather valuable gift from the government which had sentenced him to this place.

UNLIKE any other man whom he had met in the penal settlements of Guiana, Ducrin did not consider himself unjustifiably or wrongly sentenced for the crime he had committed. To him, from the beginning, the affair in which he had involved himself had been a gamble which he might readily lose, with the payment just such as he had speedily received.

In company with two confederates, he had used his position as croupier in the baccarat rooms of the Monte Carlo Casino to defraud his employers and, through them, the government, which drew a direct revenue from the Casino. The system he and his confederates had used had been a very clever one, and his own invention.

Through years of manipulation and experimentation with packs of cards and chemicals, Ducrin had learned that an ink which was invisible to the naked eye could be quite clearly seen by any one who should have the forethought or the knowledge to employ green-colored glasses, which thus, through a certain combination of the colors of the spectrum, brought out the otherwise invisible ink markings.

To take several new packs of cards from the baccarat rooms where he was employed as dealer and to mark certain of them with the invisible ink, then return them, had been quite a risky matter. It had been far easier for his two confederates, playing on different days and under different disguises but always wearing the green glasses, to repeatedly call winning combinations.

The system had been highly successful, up to a point. That point had been where Ducrin, employing his logical nature, had realized that sooner or later, probably through sheer chance, one of the detectives employed by the Casino would connect the fact of his, Ducrin's, presence as dealer at a table with a player who always wore green glasses. Ducrin had passed on his belief to his two confederates; the trio's winnings had been considerable; they could quit where they were and be quite wealthy men.

But his two confederates had not possessed his logic; the combination had been dissolved right then and there and Ducrin took his share of the winnings. His former partners left Monte Carlo for Nice. In that city, unknown to him, one of the pair had the bad luck to secure a baccarat dealer's job in a small casino. The same system had been put into operation, and worked almost steadily. Within three weeks the pair had been discovered and arrested. And while trying to mitigate his own sentence, one of the two had involved Ducrin and the Monte Carlo operations in the plot.

Ducrin had been caught asleep and totally unprepared in his hotel room in Monte Carlo. All three of them, after a speedy trial before the Assizes in Nice, were sentenced to fifteen years' forced labor in Guiana. One of the three had succeeded in hanging himself in his cell the night the sentence was handed down and he learned that he was to be sent to Guiana. The other, he who had been the dealer in Nice, had died of prison dysentery and fever during his first year in Guiana. And now he, Ducrin, who had been brought to this place by the stupidity and weakness of those other two, was the only one to live. And he was strong, sane, free...

DUCRIN smiled, thinking swiftly of all that. Then he lifted his close-cropped head and looked around him, seeking the jungle signs which would tell him the way to the bayou he

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sought. Back in the cutting while he had worked with the other convicts during the last week or so he had searched for some such mark which would guide him once he had penetrated into the depths of the jungle. He had found it in the form of a tremendous and towering arrowheart tree, which had at some time been struck by lightning and now stood parched and white, a grotesque skeleton in the rich jungle life about it.

According to his calculations and the place he had entered the jungle, that lightning-struck tree must be somewhere before him now. That tree, he knew, having for some days marked the sun's passing across its topmost branches, leaned to the west. When he had come upon it he could go straight on to the bank of the Maroni. And following that he would eventually come to the masked bayou, which had been fully and repeatedly described to him by the old convict in St. Laurent.

Where he now stood, what light there was had the color of old, dim jade. Small, loose, soft leaves drifted constantly down from where the breeze of late afternoon passed across the jungle roof. Monkeys played far off and birds passed in flashing flights overhead from time to time, but otherwise the jungle was still. In that moment, taking in all those things slowly one by one, Ducrin experienced his first moment of jungle awe.

"It's big," he whispered. "Very big... Not hard for a chap to get lost here. And yes, not hard for a chap with a little brains to find that dead tree. *Allons-y*, Ducrin! Let us go!"

Boldly, smiling, he stepped forward, thrusting aside with the machete point the creepers and branches that barred his way. He had not gone half a dozen paces when a sudden jungle corridor opened up before him and he saw, down its length, the gray-whiteness of the dead tree. He laughed then, his head lifted and somewhere off in the jungle monkeys heard that sound, and laughed back. In the jungle corridor the echoes met and clashed into harsh and almost alarming waves of sound as he went on.

Ducrin camped at the foot of the arrowheart tree that night. In the bush Indian style, with a sharpened piece of hard wood and a larger, flat piece of soft wood, he made a fire, feeding it from the dry branches of the old tree. He had no food and sought none, but his elation at the ease of his escape conquered what pangs he felt, and before darkness fell, he rigged and put out two little traps along the jungle corridor.

He slept peacefully that night, his back propped against the tree trunk, his fire blazing high before him. And when he wakened after dawn he found a young sloth in one of his traps. He killed the beast, cooked it and ate a good part, taking the rest with him when he went on. During the morning, having followed the direction pointed out to him by the slanting tree, he found the river. He continued along it that day, camped near it that night, going back into the jungle a bit so that his fire would not be seen or smelled by any one passing along the river.

LATE in the afternoon of the next day he found the masked bayou, following signs he had memorized from the description of the old convict in St. Laurent. The place was very much as he had imagined it, wide, shallow and muddy, but banked on three sides by firm land and thickly masked on the fourth, or river side, by a mass of fallen trees, creepers, bamboos and accumulated driftwood swept up there during the annual floods following on the rainy seasons.

Going slowly on around the edge of the bayou he found on the one high little point of land the wreck of a grass hut, obviously the one built by the man who had told him of this place. He began at once to reconstruct it. There was, he saw, no better site than this; the old convict and his partner had chosen well.

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This site was on the bank farthest away from the river, at least half a mile or a mile from it, and beyond its sight and sound. It would probably prove fairly healthy here, too. He was smiling as he set to work.

At dusk, when he was through with his work and his fire was built for the night, he put down his machete and went to the edge of the bayou. For a time, until the full coming of darkness, he stood there, looking out over this place which he quite surely would not leave for at least five months to come.

The jungle came, dark and magnificent, right down to the edge of the water. Reeds that were high as a man grew along the banks. Behind them were bamboos, then the great and towering trees of the real jungle forest, among them the few rubber trees he had been told of.

Fantastically colored toucans, macaws and parakeets crossed and recrossed the somber waters of the bayou. Blue and green and gold butterflies made bright, darting little flights about him, and here and there he could mark the almost invisible passage of an early rising bat.

There were hundreds, perhaps thousands, of frogs in the bayou. Now, with the fall of darkness, they all spoke in a great and booming chorus. In the trees beyond, piercing the deeper notes of the frog chorus, monkeys made a sharp gabbling before settling to sleep, and the brightly colored birds gave forth high and quick cries.

Ducrin scratched the stubble on his firmly molded chin and smiled.

"A noisy place," he said aloud. "Keep a chap from being lonely..."

He turned, and went back to his hut and fire.

The next day he established the routine which he rigorously followed during the weeks to come. In the morning, he went around the edges of the bayou, finding out and marking the rubber trees. The afternoon he spent in hunting, in chopping firewood, working on the canoe which was to take him out to freedom, or making weapons and utensils.

It was, he found, a busy life. His days were fully occupied. And for that, during the first few weeks, he was glad, for it pleased him, a man who had lived practically all his life in the city, to find that he could so competently keep himself alive in the jungle.

But after those first few weeks, when the strangeness of his new occupations had worn off and they had become no more than daily chores to be done in rotation, a sort of boredom came over him. He missed something to do during the long evenings. The days, it seemed to him, were growing shorter, the nights longer. And night after night, resolving that he was tired and needed the sleep, he would turn in, only to awaken and lie staring out through the door of his hut at the embers of his fire and the extreme, fathomless darkness beyond. It was, he told himself, forced to smile at the thought, that he had spent most of his existence living by the use of his brain, and that machine was now rebelling at its inaction...

TOWARDS the end of his first month there a partial solution of that problem came to him. With considerable labor but with equal enjoyment he cut and fashioned a crude baccarat board and cards from soft wood. With these before him he would sit by his fire for hours, recalling famous old hands which he had dealt, and reconstructing them for his own amusement.

That, though, palled after a time, and one night he rose in disgust and heaved the board and cards into the bayou. The board made a flat smacking sound as it hit. That awoke the frogs, and the frogs awoke the jungle. The whole place echoed and boomed. To Ducrin, standing there, it was as if he were inside a tremendous and awfully vibrating drum. At last he reached his hands far above his head and yelled.

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"Shut up! Shut up, will you? My God, shut up!"

His shout was high pitched and keen. The one which seemed to come back in direct answer was higher yet, stronger. And with that answering shout the jungle was silent, utterly silent. Ducrin turned, making no noise. Sweat drooled salt down into the corners of his partly open mouth. His fingers reached toward his belt, where he usually carried his machete. It was not there; it was in the hut.

A little sound, half sob, half sigh came through his lips. He stood completely still, completely rigid with fright. That yell which had answered his had come from a jaguar. It was near, close to his hut, close to him. And the jungle was still — in this silence the jaguar could hear him if he made the slightest movement, if he started for his hut...

How long he stood there like that Ducrin did not know. How he finally projected his body into mad motion and propelled himself toward his hut he did not know. But, he found himself in the place, mumbling with his eagerness and his terror, clasping at the machete handle, then, finally, hoarsely cursing at the jaguar, telling it to come on now. Now, that he was ready...

But his own hysterical words died away after a time, and he crouched there silently, just listening. There was no sound. No actual sound that he could distinguish. Leaves moved; yes. And in the bayou reeds rubbed against reeds and there were the myriad and small whisperings of the bayou waters. But it was all like that, all half sounds and infinitesimal fragments of sounds. All the million and one little pieces, he told himself strangely, that went to make up the great, solid silence...

He did not sleep that night. He sat there in the door of his hut, the machete across his thighs, staring out at his fire, wishing it were higher and stronger, but not daring to go out and fix it so. And all the night, until the coming of dawn, that silence lasted. When the first amber shards of the sun came down through the jungle roof, a little bird that Ducrin could see stirred, and called. Another and then another joined it, and then monkeys began to chatter and scamper along the tree limbs. And with those sounds Ducrin relapsed, his head fell forward on his chest, and he slept where he sat.

HE awoke in the afternoon, with the memory of that horror still fresh in his brain. But here, in the daylight, with all the familiar sights and sounds around him, he tried to rationalize that, interpret it in the terms of his own normally self-controlled personality. He did so, but in so doing he allied himself with the jungle life around him, made a mental contact and alliance with it. For these frogs and birds and monkeys, all the small and harmless jungle life, had been frightened as he had been frightened by that jaguar. When he had given in to the silence which the jaguar had placed upon them, he had subtly become one of them, just as afraid, and, secretly, very secretly, just as weak. But, they were his allies now; their animal knowledge and instinct would warn him when the jaguar, the one jungle beast he feared, came to the bayou again.

He returned to his regular routine then, but from that day on he began to study and closely watch the animal and bird life around him. By hours of silent watching he learned to distinguish which birds mated together, and where their nests were about the bayou. He learned which frog had the deepest voice, and even came to believe that he knew the leader of the red-howler monkey pack across the bayou, and that he could understand certain manlike sounds in their chattering.

That thought, that way of thinking, grew upon him as the days passed. It helped pass the days, and more, the nights. It helped alleviate his loneliness.

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He told himself that all his life he had been a social person, and always close to people. He had been one of a big family of brothers and sisters. His first job had been as a bus-boy, then waiter, in a big, popular and noisy café. During his days as a croupier, he had of necessity been constantly where there were many people and much talk. He had lived in a hotel; he had never been alone.

Recalling those things, knowing that he must pass at least two more months here, he began to more closely identify himself with the jungle life about him. He imitated and practiced the calls and cries of the birds and monkeys. He stood for hours on the edge of the bayou, booming back at the frogs. He personalized and gave identity to some of the monkeys, frogs and birds; idly, he likened them to people and personalities he had known during his civilized life.

And, to his initial amazement and then great pleasure, they responded to him. They called back when he called. And when he walked through the forest, going about his chores at the rubber trees, that odd half-hush of fear at his presence no longer came over the jungle.

The days passed swiftly now; on the long stick he used as a calendar, the notches which marked weeks had mounted to sixteen, then to eighteen. When twenty had gone, he promised himself, he would go. His dugout canoe was finished now; he had tried it upon the bayou and found it waterworthy. He had a strong bow, in the use of which he had become very efficient, and a good stock of arrows. All he lacked now was a supply of smoked fish and game to hold him until he had crossed over into Dutch territory and what would then be real safety.

SO far, he had been living here from day to day, spearing fish in the bayou or going off into the jungle for what little game he needed. He had all the balata he could accommodate in the canoe; that part of his job was over. He began to devote himself entirely to hunting.

He struck far off into the jungle to do so, rather than hunt close to the bayou, preferring, as he said it aloud, to "seek strangers" rather than "people he knew." He found good hunting; came one noon upon a drove of peccary and shot four of the snorting, clumsy beasts before they could get away from his swift arrows. They were heavy, and weighed over a hundred pounds apiece, he estimated.

The legs of three he tied together with green withes, and hung them separately up on poles locked between high tree limbs, so that they would not be scavenged during his absence. The fourth he toted back to his hut with him, hung it up high inside the little place after roasting it entire over his fire.

The next day he returned for one of the others. It was dusk, almost night when he got back to the bayou. He came slowly around the trail he had worn for himself, panting a bit with the weight of the heavy carcass he carried over his shoulder, his machete through his belt, his bow slung over his free shoulder.

There was a stillness on the jungle as he passed over the ground he called his own. Once he stopped, and the old, chill fear of the jaguar which had never fully left him, came bleakly up into his brain. But then he remembered that he carried fresh meat, and that his "friends" in the trees and bush about him could smell the odor of blood, frightening at any time. He laughed, and talked to them, using the monkey chatter, but no response came to him, and he went on more quickly, eager to get rid of his unpleasant load.

The thing which saved his life was the small, light and almost indiscernible tracks he saw on the soft earth of the bank as he strode the last few paces to the door of his shack. He stopped. He dropped the carcass from his shoulder and stared, with an acute mesmerism of horror, into the door of the dark hut.

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Twin, small, opal flames which were eyes lanced through the darkness at him as the jaguar turned from tearing at the meat hung there.

Deeply, once, the jaguar screamed, then charged. And Ducrin screamed back, falling aside from that doorway, pulling the machete from his belt, blindly and terribly striking with it at the gray, snarling shape that struck at him.

Warm blood spouted over him; screams, his own or the jaguar's, sounded in his ears. He fell, rolled over, was still...

There was no sound when he came back to consciousness. Everything was quiet. He moved his hands, his legs, his head and body. He got up, staring, remembering. The jaguar lay within yards of him, the black-mottled coat stiff with blood. Stooping down, he saw that he had all but severed the head from the body with his fearful blows of the machete.

He laughed and straightened up. He turned and called out to the jungle, not fully knowing that he did so, or why he did so. Only the echoes of his voice came back to him. The jungle was still; the jungle was silent.

CONSCIOUSLY, Ducrin brought himself to laugh. He moved to the fire embers and tossed on fresh kindling and logs, built it up until it flamed crackling and hissing. He sat beside it.

"It's all right," he said aloud. "He almost got me, and I got him... Fool to hang meat, even roasted meat, right in the hut. And now that one's dead; probably the same one who frightened me, before. Toughest thing in the jungle. You're all right, Ducrin. You're not bad..."

His voice stopped then. He stared about him, some of the words he had just uttered repeating themselves in his brain. He had killed a jaguar; he had killed the most terrible beast in the jungle. He, Ducrin, who had been possessed of the same fright which had held all the little, harmless jungle life, had killed the jaguar.

Maybe that was why, then...maybe that was why, then, that the silence was on the jungle now. They had feared the jaguar. And he had killed the jaguar. It had just been proved that he was stronger, and more deadly, than any other living thing in the jungle. Could it be, then, that they had transferred their fear of the jaguar to him?

Ducrin forced himself to smile at that. It was impossible, and even if it was so, it meant nothing to him. He had his. He was going now, as soon as he had smoked the meat he had yet to work on. But, even though he told himself those things, he rose up and walked off along his little trail around the bayou edge and talked to them there. He gave the coughing boom of the frog, the monkey chatter, the unmusical cries of the toucan, the macaw and the parakeet. There was no answer. The silence held the jungle.

Ducrin was not rational then; he was far from it, brought to a vague and dark hinterland of hysteria and madness through his months of solitude here and his fight with the jaguar. He yelled out at the jungle and at the bayou, at the ones he had once humorously considered and called his "friends." No sound except the echoes of his own voice returned to him.

He screamed and yelled until he was hoarse; a rage in which there was no reason gripped him, shook him, kept him pacing there along his little path and upright all night. But at dawn the jungle was still without sound, and he went stumbling back to his hut, dropped down beside the dead fire and the stiff carcass of the jaguar and so slept.

He awoke late in the afternoon to lie still for a time, just listening and watching. The jungle was awake, it was in sound. They had gotten over their fear, then. Things were all right. He laughed and stood up. At once the jungle was still. With his trained eyes he could see

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birds, monkeys, frogs, but they were silent, and they were hidden as well as his swift movement had permitted them to be...

Ducrin sat down. He put his head between his hands and wept. Vaguely, as those sobs racked him, the idea recurred to him that this did not matter, that he really did not belong here, that he should go, go at once. But the thought was lost and overshadowed by his rage at the unreasonableness of the jungle folk, and his own stupidity in leaving meat so that it would attract a jaguar to the bayou. No, he would stay here until the silence was gone from the jungle, until they talked again, and then he would go on...

He rested there so for a day and a half more. During it, when he moved, or when he stood, the jungle became silent. By the middle of the second day Ducrin was quite mad. One idea, one idea alone, obsessed him. If he were to leave here now, if he were to go on with his original plan and continue out through Dutch Guiana to the coast, he would for many weeks more be in the jungle. And what had happened here, what he had done, and the fear he had aroused in the jungle people, would have gone on before him. Everywhere he would go in the jungle, for weeks and for months to come, there would be this awful, tight, tense silence which now locked about his brain like great and invisible bands of metal.

He could not stand that, he told himself. It would be too much. The jungle had been bad enough before, without the silence. There was for him just one thing to do. They talked in the prisons; they always talked, no matter who you were, or what you had done. And they would laugh at him there when he told them; they would talk him back to sanity...

A kind of strange nervous release came upon him as that thought formed in his brain. He relaxed, to fall in a slow doze of exhaustion once more. Awakeness came to him rather swiftly an hour or so later. His first conscious thought was of the decision he had made, and he started to flex his muscles, started to get up. But then he stopped, staring, and held by a horror not his own.

THE carcass of the jaguar he had killed lay near him, not more than a few yards away. Flies, ants and bugs had gathered about it, crawled over it, in this moment. Attracted by that insect life, lulled by his, Ducrin's, period of comatose sleep, a small gold-bird had ventured forward, in the direction of the carcass.

It stood now on the worn, withered grass like a tiny statuette which embodied all horror, all fear. But not fear of him, Ducrin. For, within three feet of it, slowly swaying and loosely coiled, lay a long black jungle snake, between it and the jaguar's carcass, between it and safety.

A slow whistling sound of exhaled breathing came from between Ducrin's teeth. But the bird and the snake were held by the deep fascination of death; they did not seem to sense his presence in any way. Ducrin's thin lips drew back as his hand slid down upon the machete handle. He struck only once, and then very surely, swiftly. With his free hand he in the same instant reached out and caught within his grasp the rigid, soft body of the gold-bird.

Even after he had acted, had killed the black snake and taken the bird into his hands, Ducrin was not very clear as to what he was going to do. But then, degree upon slowly evolved degree, he recognized his good fortune. He told himself at last that here in his hands he held a hostage, a living, talking part of the jungle.

He fashioned a light, strong cord of green withes and with it fastened the fear-numbed, silent bird to a small stake. Then he made with slowness and great care a cage for the bird, out of bent sticks, withes and bark. He placed the

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bird within it, shut and latched the crude little door. Then he turned and smiled at the jungle, although it was still utterly silent, as was his prisoner.

Ducrin stayed there beside the bayou and near his shack and the trapped bird for three days more. He occupied himself with two tasks in that time: he smoked, dried and cured the skin of the jaguar, pegging it out with green-wood stakes upon the ground in front of the shack; meanwhile, he fed and watered and talked to the bird in its cage.

He lay prone on the ground beside the cage. With all the longing and the fear and courage of his nature translated into the soft, quick sounds of its kind, he spoke to it, repeating the succession of notes over, over. When it first answered faintly back, he could not for a moment believe it, for his brain was mazed with the echoes of the sounds he himself had been making...

The next morning, with the slant of the dawn light resting palely upon the dark reeds and darker water, Ducrin left the bayou. He went in his canoe, north, towards Dutch Guiana. He carried his supply of jerked, dried meat, his balata, his bow, arrows and machete. Directly forward of him, placed on the flame-scarred bottom of the canoe, he had placed the cage holding the bird.

As he swung out in the first deep swiftness of the main river he shipped his paddle inboard for a moment and leaned down, to open the door of the cage, and then sit back. Within, the bird rustled, spoke. To it Ducrin spoke back. The bird slowly moved, speaking. Ducrin was silent, his hand reaching for something just beyond the little cage. He pulled it up, the roughly cured skin of the jaguar. He shook it out, put it about his shoulders. When he was through doing so he saw that the bird had gone, was nothing but a flicker of rapid motion towards the shore and the jungle.

Ducrin pursed his lips and called. The notes came back, almost like an echo. Then other birds spoke, toucans, macaws, doves, parakeets, aigrets. To Ducrin the jungle seemed to explode with sound. He lifted his paddle forward, out, sent it down, deep, brought it back. His eyes searched the shore, but he made no sound. It was for the jungle to speak now, he told himself. It was he who knew and who had beaten the silence.

THE END.

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Smuggling "Babies"

EVER since governments put customs duties on imported goods, smuggling has been in existence, but the smugglers on the Austro-Hungarian border are, perhaps, at the head of the class for evolving unusual methods of tricking customs officials.

They do not smuggle jewels or dope, but plain, ordinary, baby pigs. In Austria, pork is very expensive, while in Hungary, just over the border, it is quite cheap. So it pays to smuggle it across the line.

Each suckling pig is stupefied by a swig of alcohol from a nursing bottle to keep it quiet in transit. Then it is dressed in babies' clothes and, wrapped up carefully in a big shawl, is carried across the border by a respectably dressed woman who, for all the customs officials can see, is carrying a sleeping child.

Ellen Stevenson.

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MEN of the RING
by Stookie Allen
As bold and cruel a rover as ever grasped hilt in hand.
EDWARD TEACH
THE FAMOUS "BLACKBEARD," WHO BURIED MORE TREASURE THAN ANY OTHER PIRATE THAT EVER LIVED.
BLACKBEARD WAS BORN IN BRISTOL, ENG., AND WAS SO MEAN AS A BOY THE TOWNSPEOPLE SAID HE WAS HEADED FOR THE GALLOWS. AT 15 THE LAD RAN AWAY TO SEA AND WAS SOON ON A PIRATE SHIP. HE WAS FOREVER FIGHTING AND SOON SHOWED THE BUCCANEERS THAT HE WAS THE BEST MAN ON BOARD THE SHIP.
BEFORE LONG HE LED A CREW TO MUTINY AND ESTABLISHED HIMSELF AS CAPTAIN. AS A PIRATE HE BECAME KNOWN AS, "THE TERROR" AND NO MORE FEROCIOUS AND BRUTAL KILLER EVER LIVED. IN THE SHORT SPAN OF 3 YEARS HE BECAME THE KING OF THE PIRATE FRATERNITY.
HE WAS A GREAT SHOWMAN AND MADE UP FOR HIS ROLE AS METICULOUSLY AS AN ACTOR. WHEN AT SEA HE LET HIS BEARD GROW LONG AND SHAGGY, AND DRESSED HIMSELF TO LOOK AS FIERCE AS POSSIBLE. HE WAS 6½ FT. TALL AND WHEN LEADING HIS CUTTHROATS IN A CHARGE DOWN THE DECK OF AN UNFORTUNATE VESSEL HE WAS ENOUGH TO STRIKE TERROR IN THE STOUTEST OF HEARTS. HE WAS UNBELIEVABLY CRUEL.

This feature appears in ARGOSY every week

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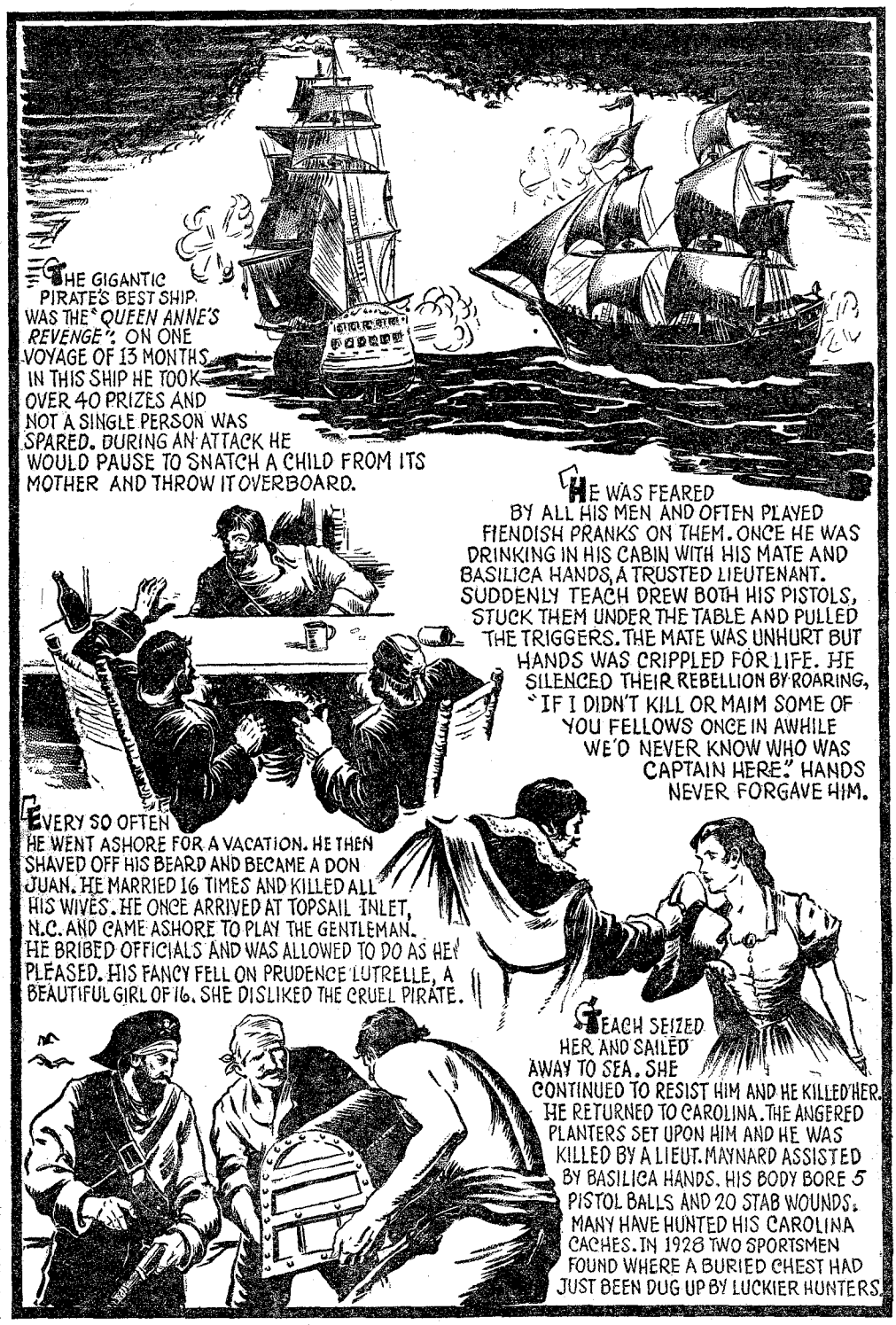
THE GIGANTIC PIRATE'S BEST SHIP WAS THE "QUEEN ANNE'S REVENGE". ON ONE VOYAGE OF 13 MONTHS IN THIS SHIP HE TOOK OVER 40 PRIZES AND NOT A SINGLE PERSON WAS SPARED. DURING AN ATTACK HE WOULD PAUSE TO SNATCH A CHILD FROM ITS MOTHER AND THROW IT OVERBOARD.
HE WAS FEARED BY ALL HIS MEN AND OFTEN PLAYED FIENDISH PRANKS ON THEM. ONCE HE WAS DRINKING IN HIS CABIN WITH HIS MATE AND BASILICA HANDS, A TRUSTED LIEUTENANT. SUDDENLY TEACH DREW BOTH HIS PISTOLS, STUCK THEM UNDER THE TABLE AND PULLED THE TRIGGERS. THE MATE WAS UNHURT BUT HANDS WAS CRIPPLED FOR LIFE. HE SILENCED THEIR REBELLION BY ROARING, "IF I DIDN'T KILL OR MAIM SOME OF YOU FELLOWS ONCE IN AWHILE WE'D NEVER KNOW WHO WAS CAPTAIN HERE." HANDS NEVER FORGAVE HIM.
EVERY SO OFTEN HE WENT ASHORE FOR A VACATION. HE THEN SHAVED OFF HIS BEARD AND BECAME A DON JUAN. HE MARRIED 16 TIMES AND KILLED ALL HIS WIVES. HE ONCE ARRIVED AT TOPSAIL INLET, N.C. AND CAME ASHORE TO PLAY THE GENTLEMAN. HE BRIBED OFFICIALS AND WAS ALLOWED TO DO AS HE PLEASED. HIS FANCY FELL ON PRUDENCE LUTRELLE, A BEAUTIFUL GIRL OF 16. SHE DISLIKED THE CRUEL PIRATE.
TEACH SEIZED HER AND SAILED AWAY TO SEA. SHE CONTINUED TO RESIST HIM AND HE KILLED HER. HE RETURNED TO CAROLINA. THE ANGERED PLANTERS SET UPON HIM AND HE WAS KILLED BY A LIEUT. MAYNARD ASSISTED BY BASILICA HANDS. HIS BODY BORE 5 PISTOL BALLS AND 20 STAB WOUNDS. MANY HAVE HUNTED HIS CAROLINA CACHES. IN 1928 TWO SPORTSMEN FOUND WHERE A BURIED CHEST HAD JUST BEEN DUG UP BY LUCKIER HUNTERS.

Next Week: "Black Jack" Pershing, a Born Fighter

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Gene's rush was stopped

Sunken Dollars

By CAPTAIN DINGLE

Two ships circled in the wreck-strewn waters of Cape Horn, ready to fight over the secret of a sunken windjammer

LEADING UP TO THIS CONCLUDING INSTALLMENT

IT was just before the turn of the last century, before the Panama Canal had been completed and when ships rounded bleak Cape Horn, that the windjammer Godiva set out from Melbourne for England. She never reached England.

Rupert, merchant and part owner of the ship, a man who had a financial hold on Captain Larking, her master, loaded a cargo of silver dollars aboard the Godiva. He did not sail on her. Fellow plotters of his did sail on her, though, and when she reached Cape Horn she was deliberately wrecked by Purbrick, the second mate, and sank in fairly shallow water.

Many lives were lost, but Captain Larking, Purbrick, Benjamin, the steward and Mr. Jolly, the mate, got away in lifeboats. Two others aboard her saved themselves: Judy Larking, the captain's daughter, and Gene Selwyn, son of the rich Melbourne insurance man who had insured the Godiva's cargo. Gene had taken the trip as an adventure—and because Judy Larking smiled at him from the ship's rail as he was passing by.

Just before the Godiva struck, Purbrick had ordered Gene locked in the lazaret. Gene and Judy, picked up by a passing ship, go on to Judy's home in England, where Larking, Rupert and Purbrick have already gone.

This story began in the Argosy for November 5

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When Gene tells Larking that his ship is in shallow water and can be salvaged, the shock of what Gene thought would be good news proves fatal. A marine inquiry clears the officers of the ship after Purbrick's false testimony, but Gene, accompanied by his friend, Jock Gowan, and Judy, returns to investigate the wreck and attempt salvage.

They charter the trawler of Captain Sweeny and pick up Benjamin and Mr. Jolly. Rupert and Purbrick also charter a ship and rush to the Godiva's graveyard. The two vessels have sighted each other.

CHAPTER XX.

THE GRAY SHIP.

WHOEVER picked the crew of the gray steamer had picked well, if tough issues were expected; and the behavior of Rupert and Purbrick, as the two vessels drew near to each other, indicated that it was no yachting cruise they had embarked upon.

Rupert, standing aloof in his heavy clothes, looked ill and hopeless. Purbrick, once he had caught sight of Benjamin on the Peregrine, had become uneasy—and now that he had heard, though ever so faintly, Benjamin's voice, uneasiness had developed into sheer nervousness. The precious pair no longer spoke to each other in confidential tones, but when speak they must it was in savage short sentences. Each watched the trawler, however, with the same earnest intensity.

"You're crazy to go on!" snarled Purbrick. "You might as well call it a day."

"I'll raise those bags if it's the last thing I do!" snarled Rupert in retort. "You're scared! Serves you right! You bungled the whole job—trying to cheat Benjamin out of his share—you tried to murder him—you tried to murder Judy—"

Rupert's voice swiftly rose to a scream, and the crew of the gray steamer grinned. They too, as had the crew of the Peregrine, scented treasure, and when men who are hired for their toughness begin to talk treasure it is bound to be hard going for their employers when employers fall out. That's human.

"—and," went on Rupert viciously—"you put up a silly killing against Selwyn—you did it yourself"—Purbrick grinned like a cornered wolf—"and tried to drown him too—and now he's going to—"

"Shut up!" Purbrick stepped close and his eyes frightened the frantic Rupert into silence. "I did my best. For the rest of us. Did I know Judy'd risk drowning for a dirty sailor? Benjamin's got the luck of a pox doctor's clerk. Knew too much. Good if he'd drowned with the rest." Purbrick gulped. Just then Benjamin shook his fist across the sea at him, and Benjamin's shrill vituperation pealed out upon the frosty air. Purbrick's tanned face almost turned white.

"I won't go on!" he yelled. He seized Rupert's coat near the throat and shook it. "Put your helm over!" he shouted at the bridge. "Go under that trawler's stern. There's nothing to be found here. It's the wrong spot!"

Silently four of the gray ship's crew closed about him and hauled him away from Rupert.

"We'll find that out—if it's true," one of them said harshly. "Leave the boss alone. We don't need you. Where that fellow goes is lead enough for us. Pipe down, little man."

The gray ship sped on.

IT had cost Rupert all the cash he could raise to charter the Gelert. The fact that his insurance claim for the loss of the ship had been protested, put him in a false position with money sources. Purbrick had opposed the idea from the first, advising a much more arbitrary procedure. The man who had killed Doakes, trying to hang another

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man for it; deliberately set adrift his shipmates in a broken boat to drown in bitter seas; lied to the father of Judy—whom he professed to love—; lied at the inquiry to put the blame on to the shoulders of Jolly, whom he believed to be dead—this man, Purbrick, had only wanted to get as far away from the Godiva's business as possible and forget it. Rupert's threat to make the whole nasty affair public, come what might, had alone scared the Godiva's second mate into joining what he thoroughly believed to be a desperate venture.

Poor Judy Larking had, without in any way inviting it except by the fact that she possessed charm and physical loveliness, which she could no more help than the pretty nose on her face, aroused the amorous ambitions of many men. Rupert, old enough to know better, would have cleaned her father's slate of debt for her; would never have let her risk her life in the Godiva's fated voyage, had she been willing to give herself to him. Purbrick, animal entirely, wanted her as he wanted food—and could go without her if necessary as he could go without a meal if big money stood in the way.

Both these men now saw her on the deck of the Peregrine, and each in his own way felt still desirous of her; though each had, in his own way, readily resigned her to the sacrifice to his greed. And, again each in his own fashion, one was entirely prepared to see her go down in the one cataclysmic crash which alone could save the poor remnants of his name; the other, with keener cunning, saw in her capture the one thing which could turn catastrophe into triumph.

The two vessels were very close. Purbrick could see Benjamin at the near rail, licking his skinny chops, thumbing beneath his open jacket a wicked blade. Judy stood quite near Benjamin, her eyes fixed in angry reproof upon the muffled figure of Rupert. Aboard the Peregrine was a confusion of tongues. Gene shouted and gesticulated at the skipper and helmsman of the trawler. The order to come to a stop and anchor had been heard clear across to the other vessel. Now the order was countermanded — Gene ordered a change of course to avoid the apparently inevitable collision—and Sweeny hesitated a bit too long between greed and discretion.

The vessels came together. The trawler sheered a fraction of a minute before the impact, and the gray ship's stem slid off her bulging side instead of biting straight into it. Men were knocked down like ninepins: but one man was not—Benjamin kept his feet. Judy fell against the rail. Aunt Kitty rushed out on deck with disapproval written large on her sharp features.

Benjamin had too fast a grip on the rail to be toppled. At the instant of the crash he flung a leg over the rail, and now the knife was between his teeth. A swell of sea, hurled up by the coming together of the hulls, submerged him, but he gave not an inch of his position. The ships rebounded, fell apart, and Benjamin was flung over between them, one hand on the rail, one leg over it, the rest of his body hanging between wind and water.

The Gelert rushed ahead at speed. The Peregrine, her engines almost at a stop because of conflicting orders, fell off, and men picked themselves up, cursing. Aunt Kitty disapproved of everything she saw; but one thing aroused her frustrated maternal urge—the sight of a poor fellow hanging on the verge of going overboard. She rushed to snatch Benjamin. Judy was before her.

There was two feet of space between the ships when both women grabbed Benjamin, and at the rail of the receding Gelert, Purbrick appeared, his teeth grinning between thin lips. Benjamin fought with his would-be rescuers. Aunt Kitty was grim. When the ships definitely parted, and the churned up water subsided, Benjamin lay swearing horribly on the deck of his own ship, his knife

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in Aunt Kitty's hand, Aunt Kitty giving him acid advice as to his behavior.

Judy hung by the waist over the Gelert's rail, gasping, and Purbrick exultantly hauled her to safety—his safety.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE WRECK.

"I DON'T understand it!" muttered Gene, when the crash had come and was over. "Rupert ought to want that money raised. It must be there, or he wouldn't be so anxious." Jock was repairing the diving suit. Neither he nor Gene had seen Judy pass from one ship to the other. Now Aunt Kitty screamed, and they saw Judy struggling with Purbrick, and Rupert trying to disentangle them.

"Get after them!" Gene yelled at Sweeny. "Damn the silver! Get aboard that—"

"Aw, shut up!" retorted Sweeny, spinning the wheel without any effect on the steering. "Can't you see the steerin' gear's carried away?"

The Peregrine rolled on the slight swell, helpless. Benjamin had escaped from Aunt Kitty, and hung over the rail screaming at the receding gray steamer. The crash had unshipped the bevel gear of the steam steering rod of the trawler and she drifted slowly to the southward; while the Gelert circled around and came back to the position at which the trawler had been prepared to anchor.

"She's licked us, by Jingoes!" yelped Sweeny. "Look at that!"

He and his mate and two engineers feverishly hammered and wrenched at the broken gear. Gene for the first time let his excitement master him; he ranged along the narrow deck and shook his fist at the Gelert. Here was the end of everything. The gray ship even now was slowing down, and he knew only too well that she was near enough to the Godiva's position to find her in a couple of soundings or so.

In ordinary life, perhaps, the fact that Judy had been dragged aboard that other ship need have caused little uneasiness: but knowing what had happened before, and knowing Purbrick's desperation, he realized to what a degree she held the key to the situation—a key which Purbrick, yes and Rupert, were quite capable of using to their ends.

"Poor laddie!" Jock murmured. "Yon smash wis a sore one for ye! Whut'll we do now? Gie it a worrd, an'—"

"Oh, go to the devil!" snapped Gene, and went over to swear at the men who were already sweating at the steering gear.

THROUGH a whole forenoon he watched through binoculars that gray ship come to anchor, moor and sound. Towards noon the southern skyline drew out sharp-lined like a steel wire, and a heavy swell began to roll up which set the trawler to wallowing until at times she put her rails under. Even the distant gray ship started rolling at her anchors, and Gene Selwyn's eyes ached and his cheeks were bruised from long gazing through the glasses.

It was darkening to dusk when at last the Peregrine's steering gear was repaired, and by that time she had drifted many miles. For more than an hour Gene had been unable to make out details on the distant vessel. All the trawler's black gang had been working on the steering gear and the steam was down. It took half an hour to raise sufficient steam to go ahead; and then darkness and a hard, cold wind came together. The sea got up with all the devilishly swift spite of those regions, and there was little shelter nearer than the lee side of Sail Rock.

"Get into an anchorage and wait for daylight," Gene told the skipper, then went below to rest his throbbing eyes. He felt helpless and almost hopeless. The riddle of the Godiva's dollars was not to be solved by him. He sat in dark-

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ness in his berth, smoking fiercely, listening to the growl of the seas outside, trying his hardest to find a promising lead out of the impasse.

He felt the accelerating pulse of the engine, heard the whine of the wind, and against his port glass snow began to pack. When the ship rolled deeply the sea washed away the snow; but there was always more before the next heavy lurch.

He heard voices in the messroom beyond his door, and the steward brought in to him a cup of scalding tea.

"The Rock's in sight," said the man.

"Is the other ship away?"

"No. Still there. Can just make 'er out. Rock's dead to looard of 'er. Crazy, they are."

"Crazy's right!" snapped Gene, and plunged past to go on deck. His cup of tea fell to the floor.

"So be you!" grumbled the steward, picking up the cup and rubbing the mess into the carpet with his boot.

On the trawler's deck Jock and Sweeny peered through the flying snow. The loom of the Rock was very near. The surf roared about it. And in the middle of the surf lay the Gelert, with the seas beating upon her. It took Gene but a minute to sense what was wrong. The dark shape of the Gelert had no motion. She lay there with the seas beating upon her like a halftide rock; and the shouting of her people rose high above the roar of wind and sea.

"She's come down on one of the Godiva's spars and she's spiked!" shouted Gene. "Stand in between her and the Rock, Sweeny!"

"Not on yer life I won't," retorted Sweeny.

Gene was aware of grinding teeth beside him. Benjamin stood there, shivering, drenched, his eyes fastened upon the Gelert. A flash stabbed through the gloom, and the report of a gun followed.

"She's swu.ig clear!" shouted Sweeny.

"Aye, an' she's dreeftin' ta the Rock!" echoed Jock. "Gene, d'ye no ken Judy's aboord yon ship?"

GENE had turned to the trawler's solitary boat. Benjamin was already tearing at the cover. Jock and a couple of seamen dragged at the falls and raised the boat above the rail, and Gene left them holding the turns and tried to make Sweeny take his ship nearer.

"Can't do nothing for him," said Sweeny, ringing his engines to a stop. "He's a goner, mister. If they can reach the Rock maybe I can take 'em off in the morning." He rang for slow astern, and Gene was about to mount the bridge ladder to force his demand when he heard the squeal of boat tackles, and Jock shouted to him. He turned. The boat was in the water; a seaman huddled against the rail holding a hand from which blood dripped; and Benjamin was in the boat, hacking at the falls with a reddened knife.

"Yon ship's put oot a boat—I think Judy is in it—" stammered Jock. Gene clambered onto the rail, gauged his distance, and leaped into the boat as the last rope parted and Benjamin thrust at the vessel's side with an oar.

"I'm wi' ye, laddie!" yelled Jock, and jumped. He knocked Gene down, and upset Benjamin so that an oar was lost. Then the boat was swept clear as the trawler began to go astern, and the sea hurled her towards the Rock.

The Gelert was low in the water, and confusion was all about her. She was rolling in the savage surf now, and quite close. But beyond her, against the white of the snow, flying past the Rock, like a mad seagull, was another boat—the Gelert's boat—under a scrap of sail. Gene groped for the short spar on which the trawler's boat could set a small lugsail, and found Benjamin already unlashing the bundle of gear.

"Good man!" said Gene. "Are you sure Judy's in that boat?"

"Sure. She's the only one as wears

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skirts, ain't she? I caught the flutter of 'em between snow squalls." Benjamin grunted over a knot.

"I won't forget this," Gene promised. "I'd never have known if you hadn't—"

"Never mind about forgettin'," growled Benjamin. He stuck the mast in the step, and hauled along the sail. Jock lent a hand, while the boat, broadside on to the wind and sea, threatened to hurl them all overboard. "Never you mind about forgettin'. You look arter Miss Judy, and leave the rat to me!"

"What d'you mean, rat? Did you see who took Judy in the boat, then?"

"Rupert ain't got nerve enough to do it, 'as 'e? There's only one man who'd think to save 'is measly hide by coppin' a woman for a shield."

"Purbrick?"

"You steer the bloomin' boat!" grunted Benjamin, and with Jock's aid hoisted the sail and started the tubby little boat to buzzing.

CHAPTER XXII.

FLIGHT.

ONLY desperation could have driven any man to sail a boat in the face of such weather; yet the Gelert's boat behaved as if some quite definite object were in view, for it edged in towards the lee of Sail Rock to hug the smoother water, and when a brief lull in the wind allowed it the course was altered for the near-by mainland.

Gene took chances as soon as he detected the change. He was no small boat sailor, though he had sailed often in yachts in coastwise waters; but his yachting experience had been in decked craft at least, and the way of an open boat in a vicious sea astonished him. Benjamin astonished him still more. The grim little steward crouched in the drenched bows, peering through the snow, vengeance sharpening his vision so that even when neither Jock nor Gene could see anything but snow and driving spray ahead, Benjamin kept on the track of the other boat with uncanny instinct.

"Lost her, haven't we, Benjamin?" shouted Gene, his stung eyes unable to see anything ahead. The sea was coming aboard with every plunge.

"Lost nothink! You carry on," screamed Benjamin. "She's right there!" He flung out a lean arm, pointing at a snow squall.

"Get the bailer, Jock!" said Gene curtly, and tucked his feet up clear of the icy water. Benjamin might be sure that his enemy was in that boat ahead. Gene was ready to believe that, for Benjamin's reasoning seemed fair. But he felt far surer that Judy was there—and that was enough for him. He would have turned back if only the silver bags were involved. Those silver bags had caused trouble enough. But he and Judy Larking had suffered too much together for him to count costs now that he believed she was in peril of her life at the whim of a madman. Madman Purbrick undoubtedly had become.

"Come and help bail, Benjamin, or you'll never lay hands on that boat!" yelled Gene. Jock Gowan was knocked down by a boarding sea, and emerged half strangled, his bailer gone.

"Laddie! It's useless," he sputtered.

"Use yer 'at! She's close aboard us, an' there's the land!" barked the steward, and ducked as the sail flapped suddenly, becalmed by a great looming cliff which seemed to grow out of the whiteness like a jinni rising from a bottle.

Then the backwash of surf from the cliff caught the boat. She lurched; her sail filled aback; the sea rushed over her stern. Why any man—even a madman—dared to think he could pull through such an adventure staggered Gene. Knowing Judy as he believed he did, he was amazed that any one man could force her into such a predicament.

He let go the tiller, seized an oar, and strained every muscle to swing the boat away from that wall of ugly rock. The sail, thrashing wildly when he let go the

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sheet, frightened Jock, who was more used to sheep than seas, and he crouched low in the boat. That alone saved them from a capsize.

A great gray sea rose up from the base of the cliff, rolled the boat over until the gunwale dipped; Jock's weight prevented her going right over; then Benjamin scrambled aft, held the sheet while Gene swung his oar, and the very sea that threatened to murder them flung the boat's bows clear. She buzzed along again.

Surf was all about them. They heard it crashing on a beach. The wind was hushed in the lee of the cliff; and they heard the splintering impact of timbers not far away.

"Stand by! Look out!" cried Gene. But only Jock heard; Benjamin had taken the icy plunge at the sound of that splintering crash, and was gone. In the next instant Gene felt his own keel strike, and then his boat rolled over and over, spilling him and Jock and all the gear out in one mad helter-skelter rush.

"A hand here, Jock! Haul her clear! All's lost if we lose our boat!" he bellowed, half drowned.

SOMEWHERE among those bleak crags were the occupants of the Gelert's broken boat. The wreckage of that strewed the shore. Beyond tide mark the snow made a background of dazzling white against which every object lay clearly visible; and there were no human forms, living or dead. The sea was already drawing back to itself the splintered planks and boat gear. Benjamin had vanished. When Jock and Gene plowed up the rough beach they followed a plain trail, which was irregular and wide, as if it had been made by men carrying a burden or men who were exhausted or badly hurt.

"Listen!" warned Gene.

Somewhere near at hand a scuffling was heard, and the gasp of a man out of breath. Then a shot. A bitter curse. A sanguine cry.

"Gene! Gene!"

"That's Judy!" shouted Gene. "Come on, Jock!" He started towards the cry. "Judy!" he answered.

There was a scrambling sound, a curse more muffled than the last; and down at their feet rolled Benjamin, spitting like a wet cat. Jock and Gene picked him up, believing him to be dying. The grim little man sat up, rubbing his head.

"Missed me—th' skunks!" he gasped. "Wait!"

He searched around, and from the spot where he landed he picked up his knife, wiped it off, and stuck it into his belt. Then he started to climb again, but less headlong than before.

"It ain't Purbrick!" he muttered, "but it's Miss Judy, all right. Guns, is it?"

Benjamin was off again, but Gene and Jock were now close at his heels. Up a broken crevice they clambered, sending down a clatter of loose stones. The crack twisted, but the mushed snow showed that it had recently been traversed, and they kept on until Benjamin stopped.

"Keep be'ind me," he said, and tried to wave them back. Gene had heard Judy's voice, and was not to be kept back.

"Judy!" he shouted. "Can you—?"

A splitting report and a flash happened so nearly together that the range could be established as all too close. Benjamin ducked, slipped, and almost brought down the other two with him.

"Yer dam fool!" he snarled at Gene. "Leave it to me, I tell yer!"

"Who's that down there?" came a voice from the spot the shot had come from. Benjamin answered that he was coming up to show them, and the voice called out: "That's Benjamin, ain't it?"

"Yer dam right!" yelled Benjamin. The snow fell thickly, and the wind seemed to have died away in the crevice. The voices carried very clearly. Men were arguing up there. Presently:

"You can come up, Benjamin. Nobody else. It's me—Stag Onions; Tony

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Pandy's here, too. No funny business, though. We're lookin' down a gun at yer, me lad. We got somethink to say to yer, Ben, my son."

"Is Miss Judy safe? Tell me that, first," yelled Benjamin, licking his thin lips. "If she ain't—"

"I'm safe, Benjamin," Judy called down. "Do come up. I'm sure these men are insane!"

"Never mind about insane, miss," Stag Onions growled. "We ain't so insane as we will be if them blokes with Benjamin plays any tricks. You comin', Ben?"

"On me way," returned Benjamin, and climbed upwards. Jock and Gene fretted below; but there had been no doubt about the sincerity of the warning, and Gene smothered his impatience, certain at least of one thing: Judy's present safety would not be endangered through any act of Benjamin's.

After ten minutes they were shivering. It was bitterly cold, and a current of air poured down the crevice as down a funnel. Jock returned to the shore, to walk about and flap his arms; Gene refused to budge as long as he could hear the muffled voices above him. In ten minutes more Jock called up to him in suppressed excitement.

"Gene! Here's a bonny find! Come ye doon, an' lend's a hand."

GENE slithered down on the heaping snow. Jock stood over a heavy canvas sack.

"It's their proveesions," he said. "The loons forgot it in their scare. Gie's a hand ta haul it oot o' sight, an' we have a wee bit ta haggle wi'. Dinna tell yon rascals, eh?"

"It's a bit o' luck we can use," said Gene, more cheerfully. "Drag it behind this bowlder and let the snow cover it. Anything else among the wreckage?" They searched the entire shore of the tiny cove, and presently rolled clear of the surf a small keg of water. Tony Pandy and Stag Onions had left each other to think of food when their boat spilled them out upon the beach.

Benjamin met them when they regained their old waiting place.

"Have you spoken to her? Is she all right? What's their idea?" Gene fired at him impatiently. "What are they hoping to get out of this madness?"

"They thought we was Purbrick when they fired at us," grinned Benjamin. "Tony give me a shot o' rum, to pay for that other shot, though. Seems as if they was all stored for a long stay."

"They may think so!" grunted Gene. "They forgot their real stores when they tumbled ashore, Benjamin. What did you learn? Spit it out, man!"

"Well, Miss Judy's safe enough—as long as you don't try to rush 'em. They wouldn't let her tell me the tale, though. Seems they smelled a wasted trip, over there, when they see the Gelert sinkin' under 'em wi' all the gear an' grub aboard. So off they pops, and drags Miss Judy with 'em, and means to stand by an' bargain with you for a bit o' reward." Benjamin chuckled.

"They took the only boat—same as we did. Som'ow or other they got the idea that there wasn't goin' to be no profit got out o' Rupert. I could ha' told 'em that long ago." Benjamin was in a merrier mood now. The shot of rum must have been a hot one.

"I dunno 'ow we're goin' to get Miss Judy away from 'em, though. They got a gun, and swear they'll use it. I got to take 'em your answer. They want a thousand dollars apiece and promise of a passage home an' no comeback, or else they say they'll rush our boat and leave us—you two—'ere."

"Now I know they're crazy," Gene laughed. "Go and tell them this: They can chuck their gun down to me. Hand Judy over to you. I'll take them aboard our vessel with us, and they can take their chances with any others of Rupert's crew we may pick up. We have picked up their stores and water, and hidden them where they'll never find

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them. If they haven't come to heel by daylight, we'll come up and get them, gun or no gun."

"That's th' stuff ta gi'e 'em!" said Jock, spitting on his hands.

Gene had purposely spoken loudly. His voice rattled up the crags. Jock shouted his sentiments; and Benjamin rejoined:

"I'm only a messenger, remember. I'll tell 'em wot you say; but I ain't goin' to take no chances myself, not until I've paid Mister Purbrick's account." Then Benjamin lowered his voice before he commenced to climb again "They don't let me come too close; but if I can get within th' length o' this—" He half drew his knife, and left the rest to be imagined.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A DIFFERENT STORY.

THE brief gale had subsided, leaving the night almost still and cold as the grave. The snow fell fast, and Gene and Jock, their clothing frozen, pitied Judy up there in her saturated clothes. They heard lowered voices above, and Benjamin suddenly screamed in rage. Then Stag Onions called down to Gene.

"Stratton"—he used Gene's shipboard name—"I got yer little man's sticker. You ain't telling us what to do. We're telling you. Tote that grub and water up here and hand it over—unless you want to hear Miss Judy holler."

"Aye, me lad, and make it snappy!" added Tony Pandy.

"Don't you do—" Benjamin's voice began; there was the thud of a blow, and Benjamin's shout turned to savage whimpering.

"Come on, Jock," said Gene abruptly. "No use chewing the rag over it. Can you handle that keg?"

Jock obeyed silently. A sense of defeat worried him, but he felt cold to his bones, and knew how miserable must be Judy's condition. He tucked the little water keg under his arm and followed up the slippery crevice.

"Stop right there!" snapped Stag. "Hand up the grub." The cold gleam of Stag's gun was almost under Gene's nose as he passed up the sack of tinned stuff and the keg.

"Let's get together and talk this over, Stag," Gene said quietly. "You've got the whip hand, and we can do nothing about it. But you stand to gain nothing without us. You're asking for a lot of money, which I haven't got. But perhaps I can make a deal with you. You can get nothing from anybody else, that's certain. Ask Benjamin."

"Maybe I can find a bit o' cash ta help oot—if th' leddy's no hurrt," offered Jock. "Mebbe she's dead—frozen ta death. How do we know? I'm 'maist froze masel'."

"She ain't no frozer than we are," retorted Stag. He argued in undertones with Tony for a minute, then said harshly: "Come on up. We got Benjamin's knife, and we got a gun. Any funny business'll be your own funeral, Stratton." As if on an afterthought he snapped: "No mutterin'! I can 'ear you."

WHEN Gene and Jock reached the ledge they found a snug little cave into which no snow had penetrated. Only the white gleam of the snow outside lent any light, but it was sufficient; Gene discerned the huddled figure of Judy. Benjamin crouched against the side wall of the cave, his teeth chattering.

"Judy!" cried Gene, and impulsively started over towards her. The gun was shoved against his stomach; Benjamin's knife, in Tony's hand, was pointed at Jock's breast.

"That's fur enough," growled Stag. "Set down right there. The gal's all right if you don't take too long to get to brass tacks."

"Give her my coat, anyhow," pleaded

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Gene, peeling it off. It was wet, and frosted, but it was something, and he was distressed at the sound of Judy's shivering.

"Gi'e her mine, too," offered Jock, and peeled his too.

Judy's abductors hesitated. They wanted to bargain, and Judy was their only asset — apart from their weapons. These they brought into still greater prominence.

"All right," said Stag surlily. "Hand 'em over. I'll pass—"

With the speed of a striking snake, Gene flung his coat over Stag's gun. Jock took in the chance only a split second later, and flung his coat over Tony's knife arm. In an instant the cave held a riot. Benjamin squealed like a trapped hare and hurled himself upon Tony, punching him viciously in the nose before snatching the knife, and, but for Jock, would have finished the job by slitting Tony's weazand.

"Now come to earth!" said Gene, amazingly coming to earth himself. They manhandled Tony and Stag into a couple of helpless, swearing, thoroughly beaten bundles. Now that possession of the only two weapons had shifted, Stag and Tony reverted to type, and started to assure their victorious opponents of their innate harmlessness, their real desire to save Miss Judy from shipwreck.

"We'll take no chances," said Gene. "Jock, slide down and cut a few fathoms of line. Don't take our own gear. There's plenty of stuff among their own wreckage. Hurry."

It was good to feel that Judy had come to no more harm than a chill which was soon warmed by the thrill of security. While waiting for the first gray of dawn, she told Gene just how the thing had happened.

"I GOT talking to Tony and Stag. You see, I knew them a bit, and they seemed so willing to do as I asked them that I believed they really were sincere. They agreed to take me back to your ship, Gene. I had been terrified ever since I was dragged over the rail by Purbrick. Even Mr. Rupert made me feel terrified. He is so different now. There is something awful between them—between Mr. Rupert and Purbrick!

"The crew of their ship was terrible. They talked of nothing but treasure. They were not human any longer. I was frantic to get away. When Stag said he was going to join you anyhow, I begged him to take me, and he really was helpful—until we left the ship. She had struck something then. Only when I saw he was not steering towards your ship did I begin to feel afraid. Then your boat appeared. After— Oh, you know, Gene."

"Do you know how it came about that Rupert was so anxious to prevent me getting back his bags of silver?" asked Gene. "That's not so clear, is it? Did they raise the bags, Judy?"

"No. They didn't have time. Rupert and Purbrick had an awful row. Purbrick insisted that it was only necessary to stop you. Rupert wanted to go on and raise his silver. I don't know what it's all about, Gene. I thought once that you were acting against my father's good name. Now I am afraid—I'm afraid father was fortunate—"

"Hush!" soothed Gene. "Perhaps he is. We'll find out. What is the riddle of the Godiva's dollars we shall know very soon. Could you sleep? I'll watch."

"I couldn't sleep in this terrible place, Gene."

"Then huddle up and keep warm. There's going to be a lot of nasty work over on the Rock. Jolly warned me that our own crew were crazy with the scent of treasure. I disregarded the warning. But I still hold the trumps, Judy. Ours is the only boat. We'll be off at first peep of day. Cuddle down. You're safe, with Benjamin guarding Stag and Tony."

At dawn the boat was launched on a smooth sea; and with Benjamin holding

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the gun in a desperately insecure fashion in the bows, and Jock holding the knife in the stern sheets beside Gene, with Judy sitting low on the bottom boards at their knees, they headed out from the mainland toward Sail Rock under the ragged but earnest efforts of Tony Pandy and Stag Onions, who were very subdued.

Full daylight showed the Peregrine anchored at a suspicious distance off the Rock. There was no sign or trace of the Gelert. On the Rock, however, as the light brightened, could be made out several moving shapes, rapidly moving from abreast of the trawler to opposite the point towards which the boat was making.

Gene suddenly steered towards the Peregrine, afraid of the hazard of landing on the Rock with all those frantic castaways from the Gelert waiting to rush the boat. He came alongside the trawler, and nobody at first seemed in the least interested in him or his boat. It was Aunt Kitty who appeared at his call; and Aunt Kitty, still dressed in her town attire, carrying an umbrella as protection against the morning mist, bore in her free hand a most fearsome weapon in the shape of a sawed-off shotgun.

"Oh, dear, Mr. Selwyn! Do come up here!" she cried. "Judy! Where on earth have you been to? If it wasn't for Mr. Jolly—the dear man!—I don't know but what we'd all be murdered in our beds! Take this horrid thing, do!" She offered the gun to Stag Onions, and Gene only got to it in time. Aunt Kitty was ready to flop, now friends had arrived. Sweeny, who had run forward when she offered to part with the gun, backed away again, looking furtively at Gene. Jolly poked his red nose over the bridge rail and hurried back to stand by the wheel and engineroom telegraph, a revolver in his fist. He looked dissatisfied, but grim.

Over one rail of the trawler ran the pipes and lines of a diver. Two men ground away at the air pump. On the well deck lay, among a lot of wreckage from the Gelert, a heap of sodden canvas bags and the manhole cover of the Godiva's breadtank.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RIDDLE'S ANSWER.

"YOU better come up here and take charge, Mr. Selwyn," Jolly called out. "I didn't sign on to work, and my nerves ain't what they was."

"Don't you believe him!" cried Aunt Kitty warmly. "If it hadn't been for him they wouldn't have let you come aboard. They meant to steal all that money and sail away with it." She caught Sweeny's savage glance. "Oh, you can stare! You rascal! Take a man's wages and then steal his money!"

Gene stepped forward and picked up one of the bags. That was just what Sweeny and his men had wanted to do ever since the first one was hauled up; but Jolly's gun and Aunt Kitty's fearsome weapon had kept them to their work and prevented them from indulging their curiosity. Now the men crowded about Gene, but a careless gesture with the sawed-off shotgun pressed upon him by Aunt Kitty sent them huddling against the rails again. He untied the bag, looked inside, and whistled.

"Come here, Jock!" he shouted, and retied the bag without giving anybody else a look. When Jock appeared, he said: "Toss these bags up to Jolly. Jolly, do you remember how many bags you took on board the Godiva?" It was Judy who replied. She emerged from the cabin, changed into dry clothes, as Gene asked the question.

"Sixty, Gene! Oh, are they all there? I'm so glad. I knew my father would never be mixed up in a cheating game."

Gene made a grimace which she did not see. Jock tossed the bags onto the bridge, where Jolly stacked them and counted them.

"They're all here," Jolly sang out,

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kicking the heap viciously. Enough trouble they had caused, he thought.

"Then what's your diver after, Sweeny? Get him up, and let's do something about bringing those people—"

Aunt Kitty cried shrilly, pointing her umbrella towards Sail Rock.

"He's run away with the boat! It's that skinny little fellow Benjamin! Perhaps he's saving those folks, though. I suppose I shouldn't call a brave man names."

On Sail Rock a dozen figures were visible; but abreast of the point to which Benjamin seemed to be making only two appeared, and through the glasses Gene identified them. Rupert and Purbrick—and while the boat was still a hundred yards distant a shot rang out. The trawlermen hauled their diver on deck, then deserted him to see what the shooting was about; only Jock Gowan's rapid action in unscrewing the diver's front glass saved him from suffocation.

Gene saw Purbrick strike the impetuous Rupert to the ground; the boat went grimly on; and Benjamin took the sculling oar in one hand while holding his revolver in the other. Some of the other figures crept to meet the boat, and Benjamin's first shot was at them. They stopped, and the rest happened almost too swiftly to see clearly.

THE boat was within reach when Purbrick fired. Benjamin's shot was like an echo to it, but as he fired he fell. Overboard he went, but still towards the Rock, and the long oar he had sculled with, and still clung to, whirled over as he fell and hit the rock at Purbrick's feet.

Before Benjamin got his hands to the rocks Purbrick and Rupert had leaped into the boat, and Purbrick, trusting to no oars, thrust up the short mast, dragged up the sail, and swung the craft not towards the trawler but for the open sea.

Gene saw Benjamin seek a sitting position, and though still holding a gun, make no move to hinder the boat, though every fathom it sailed carried it beyond his reach. When the tide took it, and whirled it quite clear, a horrible sound came pealing across the sea. It was the laughter of Benjamin—and when it died away in a fearful scream of triumph the little steward toppled over and fell face downward in the water.

"That boat's sinking!" cried Gene. "He must have pulled the plug in case they got him! Sweeny! Get your anchor up and go after them!"

"To hell with 'em! We got all we want," bellowed Sweeny, and made for the bridge, most of his men following along behind him.

Jolly at the head of the bridge ladder punched Sweeny solidly on the nose, and Sweeny knocked down every man behind him in his fall. His nose streamed red; but blood never yet stopped a man crazed with lust for illicit wealth, and Sweeny led the attack again, cursing Mr. Jolly fearsomely.

Jock joined Gene in a rush over the bridge rails; Aunt Kitty holding the shotgun while Gene climbed. She had her eye continually upon Mr. Jolly, and a gleam of possession shone in it. Sweeny reached the ladder head again, and right over Gene's shoulder roared the devastating blast of that devilish shotgun.

Some of the pellets of the quick-spreading charge clipped through his hair; some skinned Jock's ears, and a few whanged against the funnel; but most of the lead went plunk into the automatic lever which controlled the fog-siren, and the hoarse blare reverberated against Sail Rock and went rolling over the Straits in one prolonged wail of terror.

"Hand up that gun!" Gene barked, and Aunt Kitty handed it to him in person, already pushing through the startled mob on the steps, bound to see just how serious was that red trickle that had suddenly appeared down the face of Mr. Jolly.

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"Sweeny! I mean business!" Gene announced, facing the trawlermen. "Get your anchor up and go after that boat, or you'll get no pay for your trip—even if I don't put you in jail. Try to hinder me in saving those people, and I'll shoot—by the Lord Harry I will!"

Judy had the glasses. She had never taken her eyes off the sinking boat, which was not sailing now, but drifting rapidly out of the Straits. The two men in it had given up trying to get away; one bailed frantically with his hat, the other seemed to be hopelessly trying to stop the leak which was drowning them.

The Peregrine's windlass began to clatter. Sweeny's men had no liking for that sawed-off shotgun now that it was in other hands; though it had been their own mate's bright idea when first they had plotted to make of the Godiva's dollars a scoop of their own. Judy ran up to the bridge. She was enough of a sailor herself to feel troubled at the sight of drowning men, although through those very men her own life had been more than once in jeopardy.

Tony Pandy and Stag Onions apparently had resolved to be good, for they worked noisily, with many a glance at Gene on the bridge. Judy paid little attention to them; but she was anxious about that boat, for, besides the lives of the two men in it there were also those castaways on Sail Rock, whom she knew could never be taken off without a boat. She went to Gene. The siren nearly deafened her, for there had been no time to bother to stop the broken mechanism.

"Can't we hurry, Gene? That boat's rolling gunnels under now," she said. He was gazing fixedly at a point beyond the Rock, just coming in sight as the trawler ranged ahead to the pull on her cable, Jock was gazing too, and he gently took the glasses from her. In a few seconds he cried out:

"Yon's the government steamer fra Punta Arenas! The ship that veesits th' refuge huts aboot these pairts. She's makin' for oor boat, Gene."

"Then it's the steamer that picked us up, Judy," said Gene. He took the glasses in turn. A muttering escaped from his parted lips. "They're fighting! The fools! They might as well drown themselves as each other. Ah! Over they go! I'm afraid that steamer's too late. Purbrick and Rupert are gone, Judy."

"Maybe they didna want ta be saved by a government steamer," offered Jock.

"I shouldn't wonder if you're right!" said Gene, and rang the engineroom telegraph to slow ahead as Sweeny yelled that the anchor was aweigh.

NOW the approaching steamer was flying signals. She passed the deserted boat, steaming slowly, apparently seeking any trace of the vanished occupants.

"She's asking if we want assistance," growled Jolly. "I should say we don't. The roughhouse is over, ain't it?"

"Get the book," snapped Gene. "Answer that there are men on the Rock to be taken off, and we have no boat. Quicker if you can wig-wag the message. Can you?" Jolly began waving his arms stiffly. A man on the steamer's bridge answered, and the message went on. "Tell them that we have a whole crew of mutineers aboard here, which we'd like them to take off and lend us men enough to carry us into port. Tell them to take the men off Sail Rock first."

The Peregrine's crew watched the signaling without much interest. Gene steered to keep Jolly invisible to them, and all they got, if any could read the smart wig-wagging from the government steamer, were the answers, which only seemed to say that a boat would be sent over. They saw the boat take off the men from the Rock and put them aboard; then the boat came to the Peregrine, and at last Sweeny awoke to the fact that the men in her were armed.

"What's the game?" he yelled at Gene. Gene stood at the ladder with his

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shotgun; Jolly rested his revolver on the rail beside him. Judy stepped close to Gene, looking troubled.

"Can't we do without this?" she pleaded. "After all, these men have done the work for us—and they haven't really harmed us."

"Let them go, Judy," he said gravely. "You'll understand when we're left to follow them in. I can't tell you now, because I can't let anybody else know the truth.

"I'm working for your father's memory as much as for my father's interests. You must trust me."

When half a dozen seamen and firemen climbed on board the Peregrine, grinning recognition at Judy and Gene, the canvas bags lay behind the wheelhouse covered over with a tarpaulin. In the boat was a long oar, which was handed up. It had the Peregrine's name burnt into the loom, hence they returned it. But Gene saw tied to it by a fathom of twine the plug of the boat it belonged to; and Benjamin's simple little piece of dying humor was plainly revealed.

The little man must have loosened the plug just before reaching the Rock; and had he carried out his vengeance and been able to replace the plug perhaps he meant to let others come into his boat. But he had prepared for failure, and in failing had made sure of vengeance, for with him went the oar, and with the oar the plug.

The government steamer was far ahead when darkness fell again, and the Peregrine followed her stern light. One of the loaned men steered; and as soon as all the other men except a lookout had taken themselves out of sight, Gene quietly collected his own party. He had some difficulty at first in locating Mr. Jolly, but Judy finally found him, in very close proximity to Aunt Kitty, whose indignation at her niece's invasion perhaps showed how the wind was blowing upon her mature emotions.

"Don't make a noise," warned Gene. "Come on to the fiddley. It's warm and dry there, and within reach of the riddle I'm going to solve for you, Judy."

WHEN they were seated, Gene reached up and drew down a canvas bag from the rear of the wheelhouse. He opened it, and carefully flashed a torch on the contents. Aunt Kitty was not present. She had seemed to be ruffled at the moment, and Gene was glad of an excuse to let her cool off elsewhere. She was a talkative lady, though likely to make a good match for a mature sailorman.

Judy peered into the bag, picked up a handful of metal, and looked bewilderedly at Gene. Jock and Jolly simply stared. Gene did not laugh. He drew down more bags and opened them one by one.

"Get them all down here, Jock," he said. "Don't let them clink. I'll tell you the answer, then I'll show you my idea of what the proper solution should be." Judy sat in dumfounded silence until the bags lay all about them on the warm iron.

"There never was any silver," Gene said. "It's a clever trick, and barring accidents my father would have been badly swindled without a possibility of comeback. Lloyds, too, would have paid out on the ship and cargo simply on the verdict of the board of inquiry. If Judy and I had been drowned in the storeroom, the thing would be forgotten by now. But Rupert shipped these iron washers!

"By taking in Benjamin and Purbrick and bribing the dock policeman there were enough men in it to get the bags on board safely. Benjamin was the last man to handle them; and Benjamin had done it many a time in a legitimate way. You know how common a thing it is for buyers to collect silver dollars from traders in the Islands and on the Coast.

"They buy them at a discount and send them to any silver market when silver's up. It's only a moderately profitable business when done legitimately;

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but it's a smart trick to ship a tankful of washers and insure them for fifty thousand or one hundred thousand dollars, then lose the ship.

"If a bank had shipped them, as usually happens, they would have been checked far more closely; but Rupert himself was the shipper, and he helped to ship them in a vessel he had used before; and he insured them with my father, who had done his business before. Up to this affair, Rupert enjoyed a high reputation—at least, he had never been found out. He got Captain Larking—" Judy was in trouble now, and Gene stopped short. He drew her to him, and concluded in a briefer fashion than he had begun:

"Had that insurance been paid, I must have taken this junk home and opened up the whole matter again in sheer justice. Now I shall take the thing into my own hands — for Judy's sake. There will be no claim made now. Rupert can't claim—poor devil. That was why he *had* to get back here when he heard the Godiva's cargo could be raised. He had to get at the evidence and destroy it. Otherwise both his reputation and his insurance claim were lost.

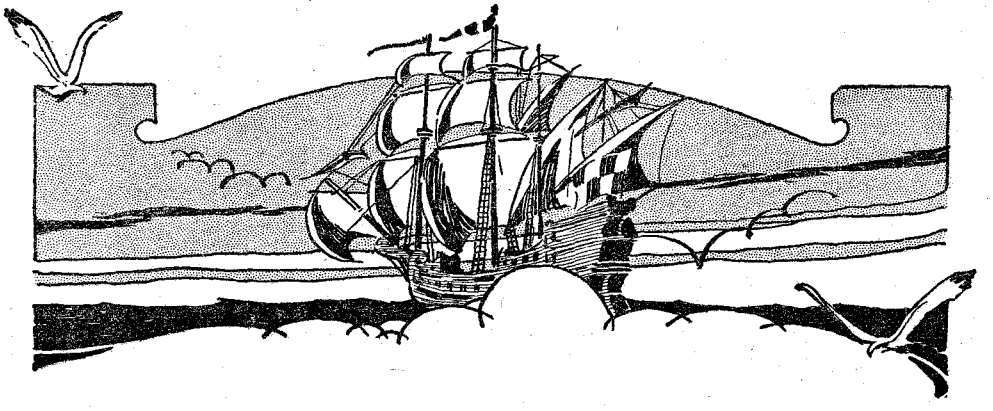
"All the men who were in with him are— Well, when Purbrick double crossed Benjamin, and sent him adrift in a boat doomed to sink, he started something which recoiled upon his own head. It's been a dirty business enough. I shall keep one of these bags to take home to father, and the rest—Jolly, you know these waters, they're fairly deep, and if nobody but ourselves sees, I think my father will agree that I've done right. Come on. All of you. One at a time, without splash. You throw the first one, Judy. Open it and let it trickle. I defy anybody to raise Godiva's dollars for the third time."

One by one the bags were opened and emptied into the sea. The empty bags made no sound, the iron disks only added a little to the swish of the bow wave. The last bag Gene fastened up and tucked under his coat to take below. He left Mr. Jolly on the bridge, and when he took Judy's arm to lead her below, Aunt Kitty stole up the ladder. Judy was crying softly, but it was with gratitude. She pressed Gene's hand.

"I really couldn't see how you could do justice to your own father and not label mine a scoundrel," she said. "It's bad enough, but—"

"Hush," he soothed her, catching her to him in the dim companionway. "Let the dead bury their dead, dear. You're coming home with me, and you'll never hear that word spoken. We'll take Jock with us too. Out there the girls never let their laddies out of their sight. That's the sort for Jock." He kissed her. "And for us, too, Judy, what?"

THE END.



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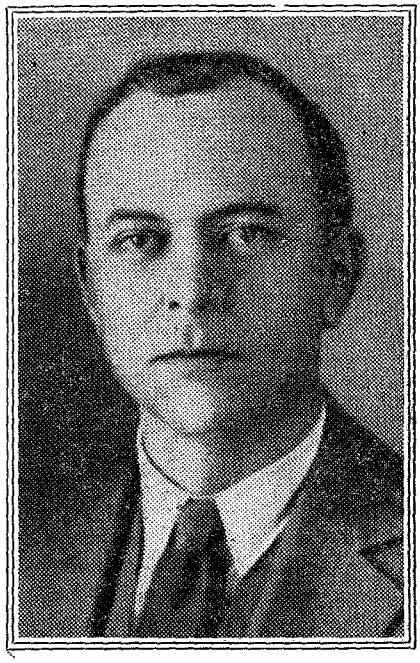
The Men Who Make The Argosy

MAX BRAND

Author of "The Untamed," "The Night Horseman," "The Longhorn Feud," etc.

MAX BRAND is a Californian who saw the West first in the central valley of the State, where the Coast Range ran low on one side and the Sierra Nevadas on clear days were green and brown over the foothills, and blue or glass-white above. He learned something of cattle and cattlemen among the great grasslands of the foothills, but he never was so deep in that Old West which is a golden legend to-day, as when he spent a few weeks with two old trappers near the Diablo Mountains, close to El Paso, in Texas.



Nick and Alec had fought Indians, ridden range, prospected for gold, made fortunes for others, and had never been able to spend all the wealth that had poured in upon their minds. Some of the glory of mountains and desert remained with them as a perpetual heritage. Nick, at seventy-eight, had a body bent and twisted by age; Alec at eighty was straight as a stick, with no visible sign of the passage of time about him. But Alec was apt to blame his inability to read upon a defect of his eyes.

They quarreled constantly. To Max Brand, Nick reported that Alec was just a touchy old idiot—who could not even read! And what is a man capable of when he cannot read print? Alec, with equal fervor, reported that poor Nick was not to be blamed for weakness of temper and mind, for, said Alec, when a man's body is bent his brain is sure to sag also! But in spite of their wrangling, the two loved one another with a perfect devotion. And the long tales which they told in the evenings, making sixty years of Western history breathe and repainting mountains and deserts, have never been out of the mind of Max Brand. Nothing is more vivid to him than the memory of the little shanty near the "tank," the small stretchers on which the skins of coyotes and bobcats were drying, and the wrangling voices of old Nick and Alec.

Max Brand has been a traveler for a great many years, from the Pacific Islands to the deserts of northern Africa, but when he searches for stories, he most often goes back to that shanty in Texas, and the voices of the two old men pour up in his mind. That is why Western themes generally have come off his typewriter during the last sixteen years. In fact, he has written more Western stories than any other author. He is forty years old, was born on the Coast, spent twenty-three years in California, and since that time has lived east and west in divers parts of the world.

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The Story of the ARGOSY

FIFTY years ago a young man from Maine came to New York with $40, a grip full of manuscripts, and the undying determination to start a magazine. Frank A. Munsey had too much spirit and ability to be content as a clerk, a telegrapher, or even as manager of Augusta's Western Union office. He had no magazine experience and no backing—the backer who was to put up $2,500 in cash backed out after Mr. Munsey reached New York. His chief assets were the ambition and hard-working energy of an Alger boy hero. So it was deeply fitting that his magazine, *The Golden Argosy*, opened with "Do and Dare, or a Brave Boy's Fight for Fortune," a serial by that greatest of boys' writers, Horatio Alger, Jr.

Frank A. Munsey

That first *Golden Argosy*, dated December 9, 1882, bore the subtitle, "Freighted with Treasures for Boys and Girls." The treasures included a second serial, "Nick and Nellie, or God Helps Them That Help Themselves," by Edward S. Ellis; "Brave Bessie, or the Queen's Ambassador," by Fred M. Harrison; "The Dogs of St. Bernard," by W. H. W. Campbell; a puzzle department, exchanges, a department devoted to Amateur Journalism, and brief fact items. It was an eight-page, newspaper-shaped weekly of the size and appearance of the late *Youth's Companion*.

A Dauntless Struggle

From the start the ARGOSY sailed a stormy course. Difficulties piled on disappointments, while Mr. Munsey carried on his desperate fight to keep the magazine afloat, by acting as editor, publisher, and even as a serial writer. In his own words:

"The ARGOSY was founded on a definite idea. It has carried straight through on that idea—the publication of decent fiction, good red-blooded fiction for the millions. The ARGOSY had its troubles and its struggles — enough of them to sink the Leviathan. Few publications have ever had so many and pulled through. The reason the ARGOSY kept on living was because it didn't know when it was licked, and so it wasn't licked. Just how the ARGOSY survived its first five years, without capital, without money in the bank, and without experience in its management, is beyond the comprehension of itself and the spirit back of it."

Among the writers of serials in ten and twenty weekly installments were Horatio Alger, Jr., Frank A. Munsey, Oliver Optic, G. A. Henty, R. H. Titherington, and Matthew White, Jr., who became ARGOSY's editor and piloted the magazine for decades.

The magazine soon began appealing to older readers, and its name became The ARGOSY. In 1894 it was changed from newspaper shape to much the present magazine size. Profuse illustrations of famous men and events graced its pages, with informative articles, poems and departments being emphasized as much as fiction.

But a great step in magazine pioneering came in 1896, when The ARGOSY became the first all-fiction magazine. No articles or illustrations—just a rich cargo of entertaining fiction full of adventure and romance. It was printed on the present type of un-

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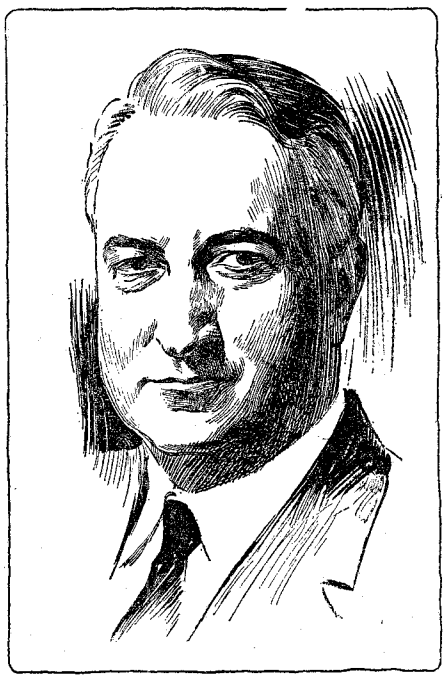
glazed newsprint or "pulp" paper. The all-fiction ARGOSY enjoyed swift popularity, yet the venture was so novel that for years it had no direct competition.

Interesting Landmarks

Around the turn of the century, Upton Sinclair (not yet the famous radical) was writing adventure serials for ARGOSY. Charles G. D. Roberts, William MacLeod Raine, James Branch Cabell, Ellis Parker Butler, Louis Joseph Vance, Sidney Porter (who later wrote under the name of O. Henry), Susan Glaspell, and Mary Roberts Rinehart were among its writers, in many cases trying their wings for the first time, on romance and adventure. For a decade Albert Payson Terhune wrote two or three serials annually. Frederick Van Rensselaer Dey of the Nick Carter tales, Jesse L. Lasky of motion picture fame, and Channing Pollock, the playwright, were among other contributors.



William T. Dewart

Meantime two historic magazines had been merged with ARGOSY. When *Peterson's Magazine* was started in 1842, it was America's third magazine, and later it was the leading publication of Civil War days. Mr. Munsey bought it in 1898 and combined it with ARGOSY.

The nation's first magazine was *Godey's Lady's Book*, founded in 1830. For years it dictated or mirrored fashions and Victorian morality in this country. Under its later name of *Godey's Magazine* it was merged with Munsey's *Puritan*, then with *Junior Munsey*, and in 1902 with ARGOSY.

So ARGOSY might, in a far-fetched sense, claim to date back more than a century. But the all-fiction ARGOSY inherited nothing in the way of policies or writers from those two literary landmarks—whereas it did draw much lifeblood in the form of writers and readers from its merger with its companion magazine, the *All-Story Weekly*, in 1920.

Among the now famous writers who found a welcome in the years before this merger were Frank Condon, Frank Sullivan, Courtney Ryley Cooper, Elmer L. Reizenstein (Elmer Rice), P. G. Wodehouse, Merle W. Crowell, Captain A. E. Dingle, Zane Grey with "The Last of the Duanes," Arthur Somers Roche, Achmed Abdullah, Edison Marshall, Octavus Roy Cohen, Berton Braley, George F. Worts, Max Brand, Sam Hellman, William Slavens McNutt, and Carolyn Wells.

The Argosy-Allstory Weekly

In the war year of 1917 ARGOSY returned to the weekly field, where its long-standing policy of keeping four or five serials running in every issue proved even more popular than in its monthly appearances. And this popularity doubled after its union with *All-Story* as *"The Argosy-Allstory Weekly,"* giving it the position it still holds—the most widely circulated action magazine.

The All-Story Magazine was founded in 1905. Bob Davis, famous discoverer of budding literary genius, edited it. In the *All-Story's* fifteen-year career he published such stories as Burroughs's "Tarzan of the Apes," Max Brand's "The Untamed," and Mary Roberts Rinehart's "The Circular Staircase" and "The Man in Lower Ten." Among its star writers were A. Merritt, John Buchan, Charles Neville Buck, Octavus Roy Cohen, Zane Grey, and E. Phillips Oppenheim.

The Argosy-Allstory Weekly continued under that title until 1929, when it returned to the name ARGOSY. The present number, marking the fiftieth anniversary, is the 1,670th consecutive appearance of ARGOSY, which has never missed an issue.

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Today ARGOSY features more than a hundred regular writers of adventure, mystery, and romance. Picking a few at random, one might mention H. Bedford-Jones, Charles Alden Seltzer, T. S. Stribling, Fred MacIsaac, Robert Carse, Edgar Rice Burroughs, Erle Stanley Gardner, Captain Dingle, Frank L. Packard, Johnston McCulley, Max Brand, J. Allan Dunn, A. Merritt, Theodore Roscoe, Ellis Parker Butler, Hulbert Footner, F. V. W. Mason, Lowell Thomas, Ray Cummings, Frank Richardson Pierce, W. Wirt, J. E. Grinstead, Otis Adelbert Kline, W. C. Tuttle, and George F. Worts.

Changes have come through the years in the shape and appearance of the magazine, in the maturity of its reading public. Editors and writers have come and gone. The ownership passed, after the death of Mr. Munsey, to myself.

Throughout the changes of half a century the ARGOSY has held steadfast to the policy of printing "decent fiction, good red-blooded fiction for the millions." Clean, wholesome entertainment has been ARGOSY's purpose, and is its reason for existence.

WILLIAM T. DEWART,
Publisher.

YOUR VOTE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

Name.....

Street.....

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12-10

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Nature's wrath makes a plaything of New York—and changes the face of the earth for a handful of castaways. ***A long novelette***

By Erle Stanley Gardner

O'Reilly's Cavalry

A two-part novel of war and daring in Empress Maria Theresa's Austria,

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A humorous short story by an outstanding American writer:

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COMING TO YOU IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—DECEMBER 17TH

9A—10

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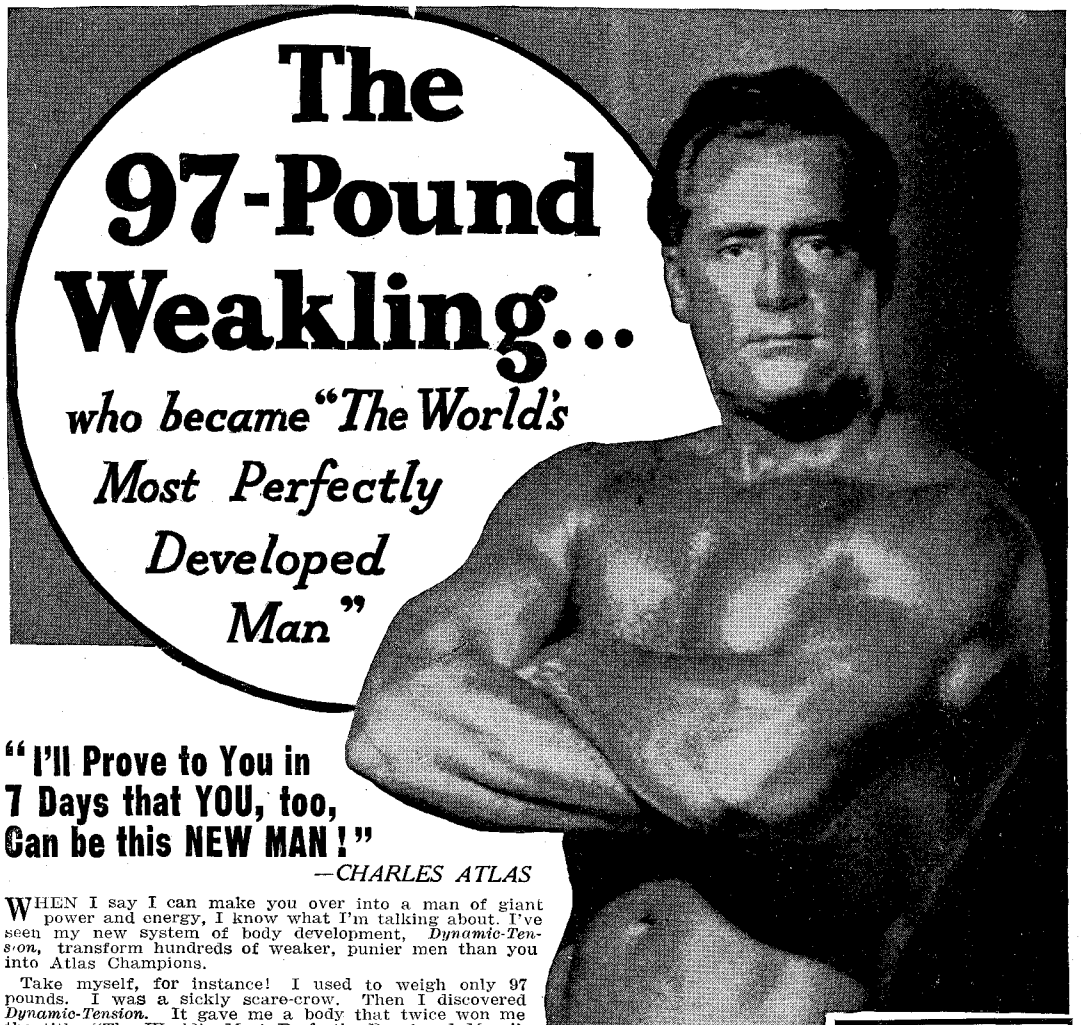

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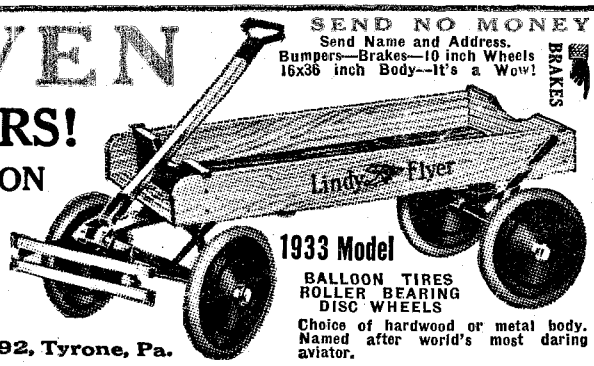

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OR BIG CASH COMMISSION.

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Send Name and Address

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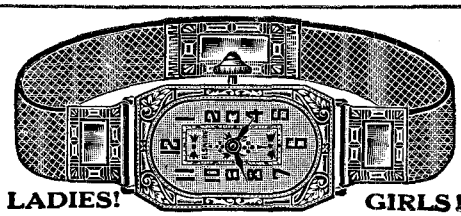

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